



# Introduction to Confidence Building for Horse and Rider

By Vicki Jayne Yates BA Hons

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## Introduction

I wrote the Introduction to Confidence Building for Horse and Rider to support people I taught to go alongside horsemanship sessions. I have since retired from teaching. However these resources I gift for you to use alongside support from a practitioner of your own choice. Over the years I have helped many to regain their confidence. Plus tackled my own inner demons that arrived during treatment and recovery from breast cancer. My aim is to help people understand the bigger picture of how we and our horses can be trapped. And to share the simple and easy to use techniques I have discovered. These you may find useful as tools for your personal road map to building confidence, banishing anxiety and dealing with trauma.

**This resource should not be used as a replacement for professional support. Horses are big, strong and fast animals that when they lack confidence, become anxious or fearful can become very dangerous.**

The contents here are based upon using guiding principal to support ethical horsemanship. There are many excellent ethical practitioners and this resource will not examine the ethics of horsemanship. I will touch upon cognitive behavioural techniques in relation to horsemanship, with the aim to support horse owners and riders to utilize a very valuable resource within ourselves for working with horses and to help with day to day life challenges. The topic of cognitive behaviour is vast and there are many in-depth publications on this subject.

There have been many experiences, people and horses that have guided and shaped me over the years, far too many to list in detail. Life experiences both good and bad, people and horses can offer you insights, there are lessons to be learnt everyday. I have gained many skills, knowledge and understanding not only from the equestrian world but from other life journeys too.



## Guiding Principles

Here I share some of my guiding principles that underpin my work and how I conduct my life. Without applying the guiding principles you may struggle to use some of the techniques I share. These guiding principles are simple, they have layers so you can start today to apply them with the aim to refine and develop your skills in these areas. For me is not a destination but a journey, a never ending journey of discovery, refining our skills and self improvement. I will share with you briefly some of these principles with the aim for you to take away my ideas and see if they feel right for you. If they do you can apply them to not only your horsemanship but to your life in general. Why not challenge yourself to road test some of them? Then see what benefits they bring to you and your horse.

## Comfort Zone

Have you ever stopped to think about your and your horse's comfort zones? And the impact it has on your relationship and your riding? What effect it has? What benefits it has? What limitations it has? How it affects confidence positively and negatively? To help understand our own and our horse's comfort zones, let's start by finding out more about your and your horse's comfort zones.

### Your Horse's Comfort Zone Exercise

- Write on the top of a sheet of paper – My Horse's Comfort Zone. Jot down a list of what your horse finds easy, is comfortable with, is happy with, what your horse enjoys and finds fun.
- Write on another sheet of paper – What is Outside My Horse's Comfort Zone. Here list things your horse finds tricky, difficult, or cause fear, anxiety, stress etc.

### Your Comfort Zone Exercise

Now think about yourself. Repeat the exercise as you have done for your horse.

- Write on the top of a sheet of paper – My Comfort Zone. Jot down a list of what you find easy, is comfortable, you enjoy etc.
- Write on another sheet of paper – What is Outside My Comfort Zone. Jot down a list of what you find difficult, causes you fear, stress, anxiety etc.

Now you have four pieces of paper with four lists.

Two lists of what is in the comfort zones. Two lists with what is outside of the comfort zones. The act of writing this down helps because:

- It helps you to focus on what you and your horse can do and find rewarding and fun. It is easy to lose sight of this when you are struggling. In fact the more you are struggling the more likely you are to dismiss what you and your can do. So if you are finding this hard it is likely there is far more you can add to this list than you are acknowledging.
- Time spent on in your and your horse's comfort zone enables you both to strengthen your skill base and become very confident in what you can already do before moving into areas outside your comfort zone.

- A comfort zone list is packed full of experiences, knowledge, skills, and techniques that we truly know work forms a solid foundation stone to build your or your horse's confidence upon.
- You may discover that there are differences in what you and your horse have in your comfort zones. And if one in the partnership finds something easy and the other is struggling you have a great support one can give to the other.
- Getting the fears outside onto paper is powerful. It is no longer screaming inside, it is there on paper. Getting it outside is symbolic and powerful. It is the first step in your taking control and tackling whatever the issue is. As there on a list you have the ability to start to plan how to tick them off. And eventually add them to the list of what is easy.
- Growth comes from going outside our comfort zone. And golden self-development gifts are never wrapped in beautiful paper, it often arrives in crappy paper or works clothing. So those things on the outside of our comfort zone are golden gifts in crappy paper.
- When we lack confidence, suffer anxiety or fear it is hard to move away from what we know. Our comfort zone makes us feel safe, even if it is not helping us to move forward. Taking even a small step out of our comfort zone can be a challenging. But a planned tiny step out with the knowledge you can return to your comfort zone will grow your world. More about setting yourself up for success later.



### Compassion and Self-Compassion

Compassion towards others we often find easier than having compassion for ourselves. If someone you loved dearly was struggling you would no doubt feel compassionate towards them, not beat them up emotionally for not being able to cope. Yet we are often very hard on ourselves when we struggle. So here I share with you the nugget of developing a self-compassionate mind, be kind to yourself. If you are struggling, it's ok to not be ok. Life throws us challenges and at times in the face of things it is only normal to struggle. Our mind at these times can often be very harsh towards ourselves. Self-criticism needs to be replaced with self-compassion. If we can develop more self-compassion we can tackle life's challenges in a way that is kinder and far more gently to ourselves and others. Compassion is not a weakness. Far from it. It is one of the foundation stones to building

confidence, self-esteem, reducing stress, taking anger out of situations plus it increases our courage and resilience. Kindness and compassion are what build meaningful deep relationships with others and the relationship we have with ourselves. If you are serious about building confidence then self-compassion is the starting point. A game changer. If you want to learn more about this I highly recommend the book – The Compassionate Mind by Paul Gilbert.



## Empathy

**Exercise -** Have a go at trying to live your life with more empathy and understanding. What is it like for the horse? How does it feel for the other person? What is it like to live in that person's / horse's shoes?

Here are some thoughts to ponder regarding empathy. This principle requires you to have an open mind, to see other view points. You need an enquiring mind, ask questions, try to learn as much as you can from another view point. You need to learn to listen and let others do the talking. With people for example - How often do you find the need to cut across what someone is saying? Or finish their sentence for them? Have you fully and clearly understood what they are trying to say? Do you help people to open up and tell you what they need to say? Have you picked up on the other person's non verbal communication? What does their body language tell you about how they feel? To become more effective with your

horse why not practice empathy and compassion on everyone you meet? By developing this skill with our own species we start to understand the qualities we need to be more effective in communication before we add the dimension of developing equine compassion.

## Healing Time

If you and or your horse are suffering a lack of confidence the likelihood is it is connected to life events, or a situation, or an incident, or personal circumstances. Losing confidence usually has some reason. Sometimes people can easily identify what the cause is. For others it has slowly build up bit by bit over a long period of time and it isn't easy to pinpoint why. If you are able to pinpoint the reason why your confidence has taken a battering it is often easier to plan for success in tackling the issues. If you cannot pinpoint the cause all is not lost. As both can be tackled if you invest in some healing time. If you and or your horse suffered a physical injury you would expect it to take time for bodies to heal, and you would seek help if required. The same is true for emotional and mental health. A lack of confidence could be linked deeply to emotions such as trauma, fear, anxiety, stress, etc. If you are able to use self-compassion you would be kind to yourself and invest in healing of the mind and spirit.

Healing is not pink, fluffy or sweet. It is often hard, really hard. So many avoid inner work to heal the troubling issues. Some issues run very deep and can extend back in time for years. Healing is deeply personal and what one person and or horse finds helps their healing another will not. As a Reiki practitioner I have often helped people and equines by offering healing. It is a privilege to be part of someone's healing journey. So my advice is if you or your horse are suffering a lack of confidence and it has the root is in the emotional or spiritual areas do not be afraid of seeking out someone who feels right to help you with healing.



**Thoughts to Ponder:** Have you given yourself permission to have healing time? Have you invested in healing time for your horse? Do you see healing as a worthwhile investment? Or are you in a rush to get on, get going, to push through? Sometimes to push on works. Other times without the healing time the issues are still there and can resurface again at a future date.

Healing with your horse can be a profound experience. It can and does change people's lives for the better. Horses carry the wisdom of healing. There is plenty of research done into the therapeutic benefits of connecting with equines. If you are interested in this as a topic The Non Ridden Equine Association UK has a library of resources in the Therapeutic Equine section you may find worth reading.

<https://www.thenonriddenequineassociationuk.org/therapeutic-equines.html>

The gift of healing often starts with the first step of allowing healing time. To just slow down, stop, to just be, to let calmness enter.

For me there is a blurred line between horsemanship and healing. They say when the student is ready the teacher arrives. Teachers can have two legs or four. Open up to a healing journey with your horse and you will start to look at things very differently.

### **Communication.**

Confidence often grows when we can better understand our horse. Many people lose confidence because there is fear, anxiety and lack of understanding as to why their horse behaves in a certain way. Equine behaviour is a huge topic and certainly one I couldn't do justice to in this resource. There is always a reason why a horse behaves as it does. If your horse is in any physical discomfort or pain it will shape behaviour. Therefore it is always recommended if your horse is displaying any abnormal behaviour to have your vet attend to check over your horse. If your horse gets a clean bill of health but abnormal behaviour is still presenting please work with a qualified equine behaviourist. There are no short cuts in ensuring your horse is happy and well and it is always a wise investment to work with professionals.

Horses are sentient and I believe have a full rich range of emotions. Therefore how wonderful would it be to boost your confidence to learn how to understand your horse's emotions. A better understanding of your horse will in turn help you to be more appropriate with your interactions and in turn help you to be safer round your horse. If we can open up into open two way dialogue with our horse our horsemanship is taken to a level where we can be in tune with each other.

With horses we need to tune in to what they are saying and learn to listen to their communication. I have written a FREE download Equine Communication which you can download from this link

<https://www.vickijayneates.co.uk/horsemanship-resources.html>

Humans and horses live in different realities. The way we see and interact with the world is very different to that of our horse. It is a question of understanding, respecting and honouring these differences. By understanding his reality you will know when he is in his comfort zone and see his fears, pains and frustrations. This in turn greatly helps you to help your horse and help you.

**Thoughts to Ponder.** What is your horse trying to communicate with you? Do you listen to understand? Does your horse have a say in matters? Would you like to invest in better understanding your horse? Answers to these questions are likely to shape what gets factored into your road map for building confidence.



### **Patience is a Virtue.**

With horses patience goes a very long way in helping you achieve goals. How often do you practice patience? In our fast moving world it is easy to be dragged along in it's frantic pace, feeling stressed, rushed and at it's worst that the world is conspiring against you achieving your goals in life. How many times have you arrived at the yard feeling in this or in a similar mind set? What effect has it on your horse? Your horse's world is very different and this is why developing equine compassion and becoming more patient go hand in hand. Your goal should be to always be patient with your horse.

Without patience training a horse is very frustrating for the human and confusing for the horse. You can become more patient through practice. You can learn to become more patient, it is a skill. Why just practice patience with your horse? Have you ever thought about all the daily opportunities to practice patience? Here are a few examples I am sure you can write your own list of events and situations that test your patience. Examples: Traffic jams, dealing with people you can't stand, being late, being put on hold on the telephone, work pressures, demanding children etc...How do these make you feel?

It is easy to be dragged into a mental snowball of frustration and tension and lose your patience. By practicing being more patient will help you to remain more relaxed, calm and in control. To become more patient you need to deliberately set out with the objective to practice your patience. Just think how many opportunities each day you can choose to practice being more patient?

### **How can you practice being more patient?**

**Step one** - Gear your mind to being patient. Make a conscious effort and remind yourself when you start to feel frustrated or tense that you are going to see the situation as an opportunity to practice being patient.

**Step two** - Try to see the innocence in a situation or in other people's behaviour. Mostly people and situations do not set out to deliberately upset / frustrate you. Try to practice compassion for the other person and see the innocence in their frustration. There will be times you will have to look deeply for the innocence.

**Thought to Ponder.** When will you actively practice being patient?

Practicing patience has many benefits, it helps you to keep perspective, deal with life's difficult situations more calmly and it rubs off on those around you too. You will replace old feelings of emergency, frustration, anger, and stress with a calmer patient outlook. The more patient you are the more accepting you will become. As with all skills there are layers, when you have mastered being more patient you can take this to another level and practice being the "eye of a storm". This skill of becoming the eye in a storm is a very useful technique to develop when working with horses. Horses respond very well to a calming influence. Again you can practice this skill anywhere. Think of situations that you are faced with in everyday life that are chaotic and use them to practice staying calm and peaceful. Practice is the key to success as whatever you practice most is what you will achieve. And patience is required in building confidence.



### **Energy and Emotion**

Being aware of your energy and emotional state when working with horses is another guiding principle of how I work. Horses see our energy state and our emotions. Extremes of emotion can cause confusion for horses. Energy is something horses pick up on very quickly, they evolved to read this within the herd to run from predators and when it is safe to relax. Therefore being aware of your energy and emotional state of mind and using appropriate energy and emotion can make a big difference. Masking how you truly feel when with horses is not recommended, the incongruence rattles them. Being authentic is what matters and many people struggle with being in touch with their true self.



**Thoughts to Ponder.** With energy, have you ever noticed how excitement is infectious with horses? Have you ever noticed how some people have a calming influence on horses? Have you ever thought about your own energy levels and how they impact upon your horse? I like to think of energy as a scale, for example from 1 to 10, with 1 being very low energy and 10 an explosion. Have you ever noticed how your horse's energy levels fluctuate? And how do you react to this? How do you feel? Is your energy calm and balanced? Can you work on this?

**An Example:** If you are riding your horse and he gets excited and his level goes up to 8 how do you react? If you match his 8 then there are two of you in an excited

state feeding off each other's energy. Before you know it you are both in an excited state. There are several things that could happen which I am sure you may have experienced, including one or both of you losing your mind. What happens if one of you drops the energy? Chances are the other one feels this and reads there is nothing to be worried about and the energy drops.

So in short when working with horses I read their energy and try to use an energy level that best helps the horse. So with a horse with energy of 8 in danger of losing his mind, I drop my energy to a 2 and help the horse to read my body language and energy so he understands there is nothing to be so excited about.

**Something to Try -** Learn by watching horses and how they react. Observe their energy levels and their body language. When you can read energy within horses you are half way to being able to use it in training. The other half of the picture is learning about your own energy levels and how to use body language that horses understand. So be mindful of your energy and how you use it with horses.

### **Simple Consistency and Practice**

Being consistent has so many benefits for our horses, they learn quicker, life with humans is easier for them to understand and it takes all the guess work out of what is expected. The trick is to make what we do consistently simple. An approach to training that uses the horse's nature to advantage, that is correct, simple and consistent will give you the best results.

Sounds so simple, well for many of us humans consistency is something we are not great at. Before thinking about how consistent we are it is easier to understand in-consistency and the effects it has if we think about how we may have experienced it in our own lives. Have you ever experienced dealing with a person who is in-consistent? Here two examples to get you thinking: You are working for a boss who keeps moving the goal posts. You are on a livery yard and you try to keep to rules laid down but they keep changing them without notice so you get told off. How does dealing with in-consistency make you feel? What effect does it have on your relationship with the other person?





**Thoughts to Ponder.** How consistent are you? Being consistent is a skill we can learn and practice. Have you ever stopped to think about how consistent are you with your horse? Is what you do with your horse consistently in line with horse nature, correct and put to your horse simply so he can easily understand? Are you in-consistent with your horse? What effect it is having on your horse? If we practice in-consistency it is not helpful for us or our horses. It is like going round and round in circles, you and your horse get dizzy and confused. You are not on a carousel. Be mindful of what you practice, be consistent using horse nature, a correct ethical method put over in a simple way. This can make a huge difference in building confidence in yourself and your horse.

### **Layers of Practice.**

When we and or our horses learn a new skill we can refine it by practice. At first new learning requires a lot of concentration and effort. By practicing it becomes easier and eventually we master the new skill. There are layers within anything we learn. These are layers of refinement. The trick here is to be aware that when you have learnt a new skill or have established skills to recognise there are layers within these skills to perfect. The layers of practice are very useful in building confidence in horse and human as it helps to refine our communication and reach a better understanding. A great starting point with confidence building is to work within our comfort zones to refine and master skills to form a solid foundation on which to build upon when moving out of our comfort zone. We know that to build a house it must have strong foundations the same is true for building confidence. Time spent in learning and perfecting our horsemanship within our comfort zones is time well spent.

**Thoughts to Ponder.** Consider how you and your horse could spend time refining your skills? Are you willing to try different approaches? Can you spot the layers of opportunity to learn and refine within what you and your horse already do? Is this a worthwhile activity to focus on for you and your horse?

### **The Perfection Stick.**

There is great merit in practice to refine our skills, but don't confuse this with chasing perfection. It is fine to aim for the stars and to recognise by doing this you will achieve great heights but targeting perfection can be unrealistic. It can set you up to fail and erode confidence. I meet people who regularly beat themselves with the perfection stick. They feel they are letting their horse down by not being perfect. Remind yourself all any of us can offer is our best, to strive to improve our best and that refining our skills is a journey not a destination. Recognise too that this is all your horse can offer too. Yes you and your horse will make mistakes and at times let each other down. These mistakes are part of the learning journey. Give yourself and your horse permission to make mistakes and you will enrich your learning.



## Chasing Moonbeams and Spiky Profiles

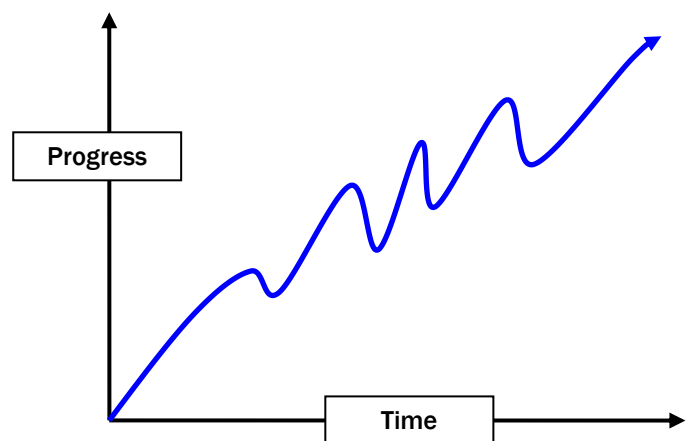
When you learn something new and you feel what you have learnt with your horse really work and things come together it can be like stepping into a pool of enlightenment. It can be fleeting or last some time. It is similar to stepping into a small bright shaft of magical moonlight, you get the feeling, you see things clearly and as they should be. Then it melts away much to your frustration and you are back to your old way of doing things. Have you ever felt this?

If you have felt this you may understand how easy it is to get trapped into chasing moonbeams. The more you try to recreate the end result, the enlightenment the more it seems to be impossible to find. This is because you focus on the end result and not the journey that enabled you to discover this new understanding / knowledge. Stop chasing the moonbeam and focus on the process that enabled you to arrive to your new learning. Then you will notice those small moonbeams become bigger and what you have newly learnt gets easier and then the normal way to do things.

Next time the frustration of chasing the moonbeam of the newly learnt skill creeps in ask yourself are you chasing the end result? If so stop and focus your energy to refine the process that enabled you to arrive into the light.

Learning for humans and horses very rarely follows a smooth up-ward curve. You will find you and your horse will have good days and bad days. Sometimes you will feel your progress slip away. It can feel like you take two steps forward and one back. This is a spiky profile, and it is very normal. To help you stay positive at times like this it is best to focus on the total distance travelled.

With a spiky profile, the downward dips are an indication that you should focus on your previous learning to consolidate this learning before moving on. Maybe it is the horse and or the human that needs more time to embed this learning. So be prepared to go back and look at the stages that you and your horse have found easy before working on the area that caused the downward dip. By consolidating your learning you will have a stronger base to build further learning / training upon. So it is time very well spent.



A chart of a spiky profile



## Healthy Horse & Human

It is our responsibility to ensure our horse is healthy. A horse that is in pain or is unwell can become dangerous, unpredictable unsafe to handle and ride. Our horse can only communicate he has a health problem in the only way he knows how. Many horses hide illness, it is a natural response as in the wild a horse would not want predators single them out as an easy target. Other horses are great at trying to get us to understand they have a problem. However us humans often miss the signals or misinterpret them as bad behaviour.

It is essential you learn how to recognise the indicators of good health in a horse and what is normal for your horse. All horses are individuals therefore it is essential you become familiar with what is their normal behaviour. The vital signs for horses can vary slightly from one horse to another so get to know what is normal for your horse.

You also need to have knowledge of how to keep your horse healthy, how to care for him day to day. Horse management is an in-depth topic, one that is too vast to cover here. I mention this topic in this pack as from my experience I was often called upon to work with a horse and rider partnership that the rider highlights confidence issues only to find the horse's behaviour that has caused the confidence issue is down to a health problem the horse is experiencing.

There is a lot of FREE information on horse health available for example on the internet and in libraries. There is also a range of excellent books written on the subject and courses you can attend at local colleges, pony clubs, riding schools etc. If you own a horse or intend to own a horse it is essential that you gain this knowledge and understanding to help you keep your horse healthy.

It should also be noted that our health is just as important. Again I often meet horse owners who are struggling with health issues and these do have an impact on their riding and the relationship with their horse. Strive to be as healthy as you can be. If you are struggling with a health problem please get professional support / advice. Don't ignore your own health problems.

## Environment

Time and time again I have seen horses and humans struggling up a very steep hill to build confidence in an environment that is not helpful and often adding considerably to their problems. What I am referring to is both the physical and or emotional environment. With the physical environment it is so important when building your and or your horse's confidence that you work on this in a suitable and safe environment. Think about how your physical environment can help or hinder building confidence.

The emotional environment is again best illustrated with an example: Maybe twenty plus years or so ago when I was teaching at a riding school a new client Betty came to our yard, with her confidence in tatters. Her previous riding school instructor had not been sympathetic to her lack of confidence and pushed her

beyond her ability which resulted in Betty having a fall and losing more confidence. For her confidence she needed an emotional environment that understood her feelings, fears and anxiety and her previous riding school did not provide this, instead she left there feeling a failure. She arrived with me scared and unsure if she wanted to ride ever again. I ensured she was given both the correct physical environment and an emotional environment that was supporting, compassionate and understanding with fantastic safe horses to ride.



**Thought to Ponder.** Take a leaf from Betty's book. If where you are does not emotionally support you seek out somewhere and someone that can. Picture above is Betty with Alice.

### **Deal With The Horse That Turns Up**

How often have you had your best laid plans put on hold because your horse has other ideas? It is our responsibility to deal fairly and consistently with the horse that turns up. When a horse lacks confidence, or they are young, or inexperienced, are confused, fearful, anxious, or struggling to understand what is expected from them or he just feels full of cheeky fun and silliness etc...it is hard for that horse to focus on your best laid plans. The behaviour can be fuelled by any number of factors. The trick is to tune in and use equine compassion to understand the behaviour. In most cases your horse trying to communicate he is struggling with what is expected of him, it is useful to remind yourself with the section on chasing moonbeams and spiky profiles. Whatever is fuelling the behaviour needs to be dealt with before you can move forward. It is essential you put to one side your plans and deal appropriately with the horse that has turned up. Live in the moment. With confidence issues this takes as long as it takes.

### **Pressure**

I have included this as a guiding principle as many people get caught in a cycle of using a lot of physical pressure with their horses. I often see people using far too much pressure with their horses as it has become habit. They forget that there are layers within pressure. By becoming mindful of the physical pressure we use and using correct body language, energy and intent we can become more effective in communication with our horse. By learning to refine pressure you will be able to use the lightest of touch to communicate.

I have a saying "You use as much appropriate pressure with timing a release in training a horse to get a job done with the aim of using less in the future" The key is to remind yourself to offer the horse less and to look for the understanding of the request in the form of a try.

### **Emotional Pressure**

Then there is emotional pressure. Sadly I have seen this so often. It is easy to get caught up with goals we set ourselves and our horses. Then people compare themselves and their horse with other people and other horses. Comments from other people can fuel this too. Plus there is pressure to conform. If something doesn't feel right the chances are it isn't right for you and your horse. Yet how many times have you felt pressure to do something that didn't sit right?



### What you have to remind yourself is:-

- There is no quick fix.
- It is a journey not a destination.
- Learning will only take place at the pace you and your horse can cope with.
- It is about seeing the bigger picture and how what you are focusing your efforts on at the moment fits in.
- You can't fix all that needs to be fixed in one go.
- Accept it will take as long as it will take because you and your horse are individuals who can only ever learn effectively at a pace you are both comfortable with.
- Your intuition is your moral and ethical compass. Tune into what feels right for you

and your horse. There is a FREE to read article on Intuition on my website <https://www.vickijayneates.co.uk/horsemanship-resources.html>

**Thoughts to Ponder.** - What emotional pressures are you applying to yourself? Are these pressures fair to you or your horse? What pressures are you feeling from those around you? Are they adding to your lack of confidence?

### The Sands of Experience

Experiences in life shape us and our horses. To help you understand how past experiences impact positively or negatively I will give you some ideas to ponder. Have you seen a picture made of different layers of coloured sand or a seaside keepsake in a glass jar with layers of coloured sand? Well our past experiences are a bit like this. They are put down in layers. You and your horse will have layers of sands of experience, some good, some ok, some bad and some mixed. Have you thought about how a recent thin layer of sand that is a bad experience can cover the good layers below? This can cloud or alter your thinking. It can smother all previous good experiences.

The sands of experience can also be put on old fashioned balance scales. We ideally want the scales to be weighted with lots of positive sands of experience on the one side and very little in the negative side. So the good outweighs the bad. What if you or your horse has more bad / negative sands of experience on the scales? The answer is to focus filling the other side of the scales with positive experiences and slowly you will tip the balance in your favour.

**Thoughts to Ponder.** Think about your experiences. How many are good layers, and how many are bad layers of experience? How often do you reflect on the very numerous positive experiences you and your horse have in your sand pictures? How often do you focus on adding more positive sands? Do you let narrow layers of negative sands discolour your thinking?



## Those Who Make a Difference

I am very lucky to have numerous people and horses in my life that make a big difference to me not only as a horsewoman but as a person. To help you understand my philosophy on this I have given you some questions to ponder.

- 1) Name five Grand National winners.
- 2) Name four past Olympic British event riders.
- 3) Name three past winners of the National Dressage Championships.
- 4) Name two riders who won the BBC Sports Personality of the Year.
- 5) Name eight previous Hickstead Derby winners.

The above questions are based on headlines from yesterday. They are based on winners, the best in their field of expertise. But the applause will fade, the trophies tarnish and the achievements will be forgotten.

Now look at the following questions, again ponder upon them for a while.

- 1) Name an inspirational teacher who has helped you.
- 2) Name friends who have stood by you when the chips are down.
- 3) Name people / horses that have taught you something valuable.
- 4) Name people who make you feel good / appreciated / special.
- 5) Name people / horses that you look forward to spending time with.

Did you find the second set of questions easier to answer? Well I hope so as the people who make the biggest difference in your life are not usually the people with the most credentials, the most awards or at the top of their field. The people who make the most difference are the ones who care.

For confidence building you need to develop a network of people / horses that make a difference to you. Seek out an inspirational teacher and surround yourself with good friends. Open up to learning from different approaches and from horses. Avoid people who make you feel bad, who are quick to put you down, or take pleasure from others misfortunes, or enjoy offering negative criticism. Spend time with people who make you feel good, valued, appreciated and special. Spend your time in the company of people / horses you enjoy. Your support network is a very valuable asset in your journey to building confidence.

## One at a Time - You Can't Fix it all at Once

I used to come across this very frequently in relation to confidence building. I understand how frustrating it is losing confidence as all the things that seemed easy now are tricky, scary or out of reach. You feel like you should be able to fix your or your horse's confidence and everything will slide effortlessly back into place. The reality is that confidence building takes time and you have to be prepared to take things one step at a time at a pace that is suitable for you and your horse and above all commit yourself to the process. To put it simply you can't fix it all in one go and there is no quick fix.



## **Safety**

Horse riding and handling horses can be risky. Therefore safety should be a major consideration to all who have anything to do with horses. There are many ways you can reduce your risk of injury to yourself, others and your horse. Earlier we briefly covered how the environment can have an impact on confidence issues. It also is a major factor in safety with horses. Yes you will pay more at a well run yard, however it is a false economy to keep your horse at a yard that has safety issues as you and or your horse could be seriously injured.

Everyone who owns a horse or is thinking of owning a horse needs to have a good understanding of the day to day management of their horses needs. Horses and ponies rely on us for their care and it is important that we make educated choices to ensure our horses are kept safe and their needs are met. Even if you have a horse on full livery you still need to have the knowledge that your horse is being looked after properly. Your horse cannot speak for himself and if his needs are not being met, he will suffer. This suffering can result in behavioural problems, compound confidence issues and at worst make the horse dangerous to handle or ride. So in short you owe it to your horse. You need to know and recognise what is good practice in managing the environment your horse lives in: his stable, the yard and the paddock. You also need to know that the area set aside for their exercise is safe and well maintained.

Equipment you use for riding and handling horses should also meet current safety standards, be well maintained and replaced if necessary. In an accident your life could depend on your equipment. There is fantastic range of horse riding clothing available to suit a range of budgets. It is essential that you are properly equipped for riding and that you wear equipment that meets recognised safety standards. If you compete on your horse each discipline has a governing body that may insist on particular safety standards of equipment, therefore it is best to check with these governing bodies before making a purchase. Safety standards ensure a product is tested for safety and construction quality.

### **Riding Hats**

Riding hats and skulls are available in a wide range of designs. It is an essential piece of kit and should be professionally fitted to make sure you are wearing the correct size. Never purchase second hand as the hat could be damaged inside and you wouldn't be able to tell. You need to look after your riding hat e.g. Take care not to drop your hat or leave in a hot car. If you have a fall and your hat takes an impact your hat will need replacing. Ensure your hat has the latest safety standards for riding hats.

### **Body Protectors**

There has been a lot of design and innovation in body protectors. They are available in different styles and designs. They should fit snugly and be professionally fitted. Wear a body protector they are designed to help reduce injury in the event of a fall.



### **Footwear**

For riding it is best to wear footwear designed for riding. If you want to protect your feet you may want to consider footwear that has built in toe protection.

### **High Visibility**

If you ride on the roads you and your horse need to wear high visibility clothing. Research has shown that wearing high visibility clothing can make a big difference to your safety on the road. It could save your life!

Equipment for your horse is also another safety issue. All tack used for riding should be good quality, well maintained and checked each time you use it. The most expensive item of tack will be the saddle. It is essential that the saddle fits the horse, as an ill fitting saddle will cause the horse discomfort or pain. It is unfair and dangerous to ride a horse in ill fitting saddle. A horse with back pain can become very dangerous to ride and handle. Safety is the most important thing to consider when choosing a saddle and therefore it is essential that the saddle fits the horse. There are so many saddles available to choose from, there are: treeless saddles, synthetic saddles, traditional leather saddles, saddles for different disciplines in a wide range of styles and prices. You can purchase “off the peg” and you can have made to measure saddles. It can be very confusing. There are many things to consider when making your selection these include:-

- The type and the amount of work the horse will be doing.
- The horse's age e.g. if he is young he will change shape very quickly.
- The horse's breeding, conformation, shape and size.
- Your budget.
- Finding a qualified local Master Saddler to fit the saddle.

Your guarantee of a satisfactory saddle fitting service is to find a qualified and registered Master Saddler. The Society of Master Saddlers (UK) Ltd aims to safeguard the quality of work, services, training and qualifications of all those who work in the saddlery trade. On their website [www.mastersaddlers.co.uk](http://www.mastersaddlers.co.uk) There is lots of very useful and practical information on saddle fitting and links to finding a qualified master saddler in your area. When you have purchased a saddle for your horse it is important to maintain it in good condition, with regular tack cleaning. Once you have a saddle for your horse it is essential to have regular checks that the saddle is still the correct fit for the horse, as horses do change shape and the saddle may need adjusting.

Choosing a bridle that is a good fit, suits your horse and is appropriate for the disciplines you want to compete in is important. You need to understand how different nosebands and bits apply pressure to the horse and which combinations are not advised. Do not select a bridle on the basis of fashion trends. All tack should be carefully fitted to ensure it is a correct fit, appropriate for the horse. All tack has the potential to cause discomfort to the horse. A horse that is in pain or suffering even mild discomfort can become unsafe.





In regard to safety your horse's health and wellbeing are also important. We all have a duty of care to our horses and therefore it is essential that we are well informed. Learning about how to best care for your horse is a good investment, you will have a safer, healthier, happier horse and it will save you time and money. Preventative care for horses is essential. Make sure your horse has his routine vaccinations, is on a worming programme, receives regular hoof care from a professional and has dental check ups from a vet or qualified equine dentist. Accidents and illness in horses can and do happen. Some require the vet immediately and less serious conditions may still need treatment from a vet.

The topic of horse health is too big for this resource. For your own safety you need to be knowledgeable so you can ensure that your horse is healthy, free from discomfort and pain. The more you know the safer you can make your time spent with your horse.

### Confidence and Ability

There is often a gap between confidence and ability, one often outweighs the other. Confidence and ability comes in three flavours.

**1 – Ability not utilized due to lack of confidence.** There are people and horses with bags of ability, clearly they are competent and skilled what stops them using their ability is a lack of confidence.

**2 – Lack of confidence due to lack of ability.** People and horses lack confidence because they have not the ability to deal with the situation they are in.

**3 – A balance of confidence and ability.** This is what we aim for that our ability matches our confidence. So as we develop new skills the two can grow side by side and feed each other.

**1 – Ability not utilized due to lack of confidence.** For these people and horses it is not a question of teaching techniques as a priority as it is essential that the support is focused on identifying what is causing the lack of confidence and putting in place a structured step by step confidence building training plan. It is important to get to the bottom of the lack of confidence. The person needs to understand the history and contributing factors to the loss of confidence and what is fuelling the lack of confidence. Along side following a step by step plan to build confidence time should be spent in the comfort zones of horse and rider looking at refining and improving their ability. This is very helpful because if they have suffered a lack of confidence for some time they can doubt their ability.

**2 – Lack of confidence due to lack of ability.** The lack of ability can cause the lack of confidence and hold horse or human back from achieving their dreams. Here the focus is about teaching techniques to bridge the gap which will enable confidence to grow. It is essential to check the existing knowledge is correct with both the horse and the person as to build robust confidence there must be a good solid foundation of knowledge. It is about going back to basics and checking things are as they should be, to refine and develop existing skills before moving onto learning new skills. This must be done before moving onto new skills to address the confidence issues or you could set yourself up to fail.

**3 – A balance of confidence and ability.** This is the state that we would all like to ideally be in. Here our abilities can grow along side our confidence. They can feed each other. It is a great feeling when you have learnt a new skill and you feel your confidence grow which in turn motivates you to want to improve your abilities even more. This is a very positive cycle we can tap into.



### **Avoidance and Evasion**

Avoidance and evasion are part of the cycle in a lack of confidence within horse or human. If we lack confidence we often try to avoid or evade situations that make us feel confused or anxious or fearful or stressed, it is a natural response. The same is true for horses. Sadly for horses this behaviour is often labelled as naughty.

As a lack of confidence in horse and human can be fuelled by low self-esteem, stress, fear, anxiety etc it is important to understand the nature of lack confidence before you can deal with the individual's avoidance / evasion with the most appropriate method. As an instructor I have seen many horses that are labelled as naughty as the avoidance and evasion have become deep rooted. The behaviour may well have started as a genuine reaction to a situation in which the horse sees his actions as appropriate and logical, to the

rider or handler the reaction is seen as inappropriate. Again it is the issue of we live in different realities and to understand our horse we need to develop and apply equine compassion. Without this understanding the horse becomes labelled as naughty. Traditionally naughty behaviour was dealt with by applying punishment.

With horses the more punishment and pressure applied the more resistant the horse can become. When this happens over a period of time the horse may well have a distant memory of the trigger of the behaviour and it will have now been replaced with an ongoing battle with the human. So the next time your horse avoids or evades a request with behaviour you could call naughty, ask yourself why is your horse behaving like this? It is our job to help our horse comply by using appropriate and ethical training methods that are based upon equine compassion, fairness and an understanding of our horse's confidence issues never force or punishment.

### **Trust and Belief**

Trust and belief underpin confidence. A lack of trust between horse and human or lack belief in abilities erodes confidence. Recognising and deliberately building trust into the equine and human relationship strengthens confidence and has many additional benefits. For both human and horse belief in their abilities is core to building confidence. As an instructor I came across a lack of trust and or a lack of belief in ability as a major barrier in building confidence.



## Thoughts to Ponder

Do you:-

- Trust your horse?
- Trust your judgement?
- Have belief in your ability?
- Have belief in your horse's ability?

Does your horse:-

- Trust his judgement?
- Trust you?
- Have belief in his ability?
- Have belief in your ability?

If the answer to any of the above questions is no then it has helped you to identify areas you and your horse can work upon in building trust or gaining new skills or working on recognising the skills you already have. This exercise will help you identify the areas you want work on with your instructor to help you build a stronger trust between horse and rider.

## Prepare to Put the Hours In.

If you want to build confidence you must be prepared to put the work in. I never said confidence building would be easy, so be prepared to put in commitment, time and effort. Without this you have already finished. You will have good days and you will feel great. Along with this you will have times when progress may plateau. And you will have not such good days when it is a hard slog. And you will have bad days too. Be prepared to keep going. Keeping a journal is a very useful tool as when you look back you will see from your previous entries the total distance you have travelled. It is that total distance that is important not the three steps forward and two back. Confidence building is a journey not a destination.

## A Heavy Load – Let it go.

Many people I meet within the horse world suffer from carrying a heavy load around with them. Ponder this and see if it helps you to understand:

Have you ever schooled a horse and things didn't go to plan? The session goes from bad to worse. At the end of the session you feel terrible. You leave the stables and for the rest of the day and all evening you keep playing that session over in your mind, and the load on your mind gets heavy and difficult to let go. In the extreme the person focuses only on that negative session and the heavy load becomes difficult to move from their mind. It can cloud their thinking and sense of perspective. Have you ever thought if your horse loses sleep over this? Chances are not. He will find it much easier than you to let it go.

The trick here is to take a leaf from the horse's book and let bad sessions go. Tomorrow is another new day. Remind yourself that when things don't go to plan it is an opportunity to view the situation as a positive, as it offers us a learning opportunity, it is a golden challenge in work clothing.



## Relaxation

To maximise building confidence or learning it is important to recognise the impact relaxation has on building confidence. Did you know it is impossible to be anxious and relaxed at the same time? They are polar opposites. Did you know you can learn how to relax and use the techniques to help your horse to relax? The techniques can cross the species divide.

Before you can help your horse to relax you must learn the art of relaxation.

## It is a Myth - Gentle Relaxed People and Horses Can Not Be Super Achievers.

- Culturally we are encouraged to think being hurried, competitive and being able to handle more and more stress is the sign of a super achiever.
- There is a fear that becoming more peaceful, relaxed and calm, achievement of goals will be compromised. Not true.
- People confuse relaxation with being lazy and apathetic. Relaxation is totally different to being lazy and apathetic. They are miles apart.

## Benefits of being relaxed

- It allows you to connect with what really matters in life, inner peace. Inner peace is what is magnetic to horses.
- Centres your energy. Being able to handle more and more stress, uses up a huge amount energy. It drains you.
- Relaxation can enable higher achievement, better communication, open minds and fuel creativity.
- It enables faster, clearer learning plus easier problem solving.
- It takes the drama out of situations.
- Relaxation leads to better understanding, control of emotions, and a balanced state of mind and energy.
- With relaxation you become more aware of everything around you.

**All these turn you become a super achiever.**

## What our Horse Needs

- Horses are drawn to relaxed, peaceful people. They find safety with them. How do horses react with people who are hurried, stressed, anxious, fearful or frantic?
- If you want to be a super achiever with your horse you must firstly learn how to relax, to centre your energy.
- Your horse will look to you for guidance in times when it feels stressed, fearful, anxious, tense, etc. You have to be the calm relaxed eye in the storm.



How can you teach your horse to relax if you struggle to relax? You can't. You have to learn first, develop your skills and then you can teach your horse the art of relaxation. Your horse already knows how to relax. They practice it every day naturally in the herd. Think about how our interactions have the potential to move our horse out of relaxation?

**What stops you relaxing?**

Each of us has some personal inner struggle which prevents us from relaxing. These blocks are what we bring unwittingly to our horsemanship and we see the effects in the partnership with our horse. The horse is like a mirror, reflecting right back at us. Here are a few reasons...of what stops people relaxing.

- Switching off from lives packed with fast paced stimuli, heavy responsibilities, never ending to do list, etc.
- High levels of anxiety, stress, depression from non-equine matters affecting their state of mind and energy, in turn it becomes highly damaging to their equine relationship.
- Lack of confidence or self-esteem.
- Lack of skills. Over horsed. Fear of failure. Perfection paralysis. Fear of lack of control. Peer pressure. Social expectations. Media pressure. Poor relationship with your horse. Health issues etc.

### **Some of my observations**

People feel the strong urge to always be doing. We are human beings not human doings....when was the last time you were content with just being with your horse? Do nothing except just be? I see in their horsemanship they are unaware of the impact their busy energy has on their horse. As horse will often reflect right back at you what is going on in your life. Many of us have lost touch with simply being, slowing down, doing nothing, relaxing being calm and finding inner peace.

Identifying your inner struggle and what prevents you from relaxing. Here is some simple homework to practice away from your horse: Being bored. I am not talking about being lazy. To sit still until boredom helps you notice your own thoughts, feelings, breathing pattern, inner struggles and your energy. The beauty of this it teaches you to recognize your personal blocks. You can then take personalised targeted action to address these.

People and horses can actively practice relaxation to get in touch with their mind and balanced energy. It is not easy, it takes time, dedication and seeing it as a priority in life.



## **Relaxation is a technique you can learn and master.**

- There are many techniques you can try.
- You should try a few so as to find one that suits you.
- Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first.
- It's a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.
- All relaxation methods help a person to relax, to increase calmness, reduce anxiety, stress, etc.
- Learning to relax has many health benefits including decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathing rates etc.

### **Here are a few tips to get you started:-**

- Live in the moment. Let go of past and future concerns. When not checked they can lead to energy blocks such as anxiety, stress and frustration.
- Practice being patient. Think of all the daily opportunities.
- Use cognitive behavioural techniques to re-shape your thinking and quiet your mind. Your thoughts are a powerful tool, learn to use them positively.
- Let go of the need to prove yourself to others.
- Stop focusing on the imperfections, flaws, or what needs fixing.
- Stop blaming yourself, others, or your horse and cut yourself some slack.
- Lighten up and learn to have fun.
- Redefine your equine meaningful accomplishments. Remind yourself it is only your horse's opinion that matters.
- Each day give yourself a quiet and peaceful time. Actively relax, there are lots of methods to try, meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation, yoga, exercise, etc.

Once you can tap into relaxation you can then teach your horse to relax. Here are some suggestions to get you started. It showcases a few techniques that have meaning in the language of the herd. Once you are more relaxed with a base line of calm relaxation you will be better able feel what is happening with your horse. Then you can teach your horse how to relax. You have to tap into breathing patterns, rhythm, energy, muscle tension and emotional balance.



## Relaxation Breathing Technique

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Horses read each other's and our breathing patterns. They are very finely tuned to pick up a change in breathing. As a prey animal it is part of their language for communicating when it is safe to relax and when to get ready to run. It's a very early warning system that something is wrong. Breathing is an involuntary response. You are not aware most of the time of how you breathe. It's the most natural thing to do. Relaxed people and horses breathe softly and slowly. When we are tense, anxious or fearful our breathing pattern will reflect this. If you do become aware how you breathe and that your horse reads it you can use it to both

relax and to enrich your communication with your horse. Refinement of horsemanship involves using core breathing. To be able to do this you need to first develop a neutral breathing pattern and energy.

The relaxation breathing technique is simple and powerful. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing techniques. The key to deep breathing is to breathe gently and deeply from the abdomen (your core), getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

### How to:

- Practise deep breathing at a regular time and in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
- Make yourself feel completely comfortable. Sit in a comfy chair which supports your head or lie on the floor or bed.
- To find your lower part of your lungs. Place both hands on the lower part of your chest just at the top of your stomach fingers tips gently touching. When you breathe deeply into this part of your lungs your fingers will be moved slightly apart.
- Once you know which part of your lungs you are going to fill place your arms comfortably on the chair arms, or flat on the floor or bed, a little bit away from the side of your body with the palms up. Get comfortable. If you're lying down, stretch out your legs, keeping them hip-width apart or slightly wider. If you're sitting in a chair, don't cross your legs.
- Fill up the whole of your lungs with air, without forcing. Imagine you're filling up a bottle, so that your lungs fill from the bottom.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in slowly and regularly counting from one to five (don't worry if you can't reach five at first). Your stomach should rise.
- Then let the breath escape slowly, counting from one to five. Your stomach should move in as you exhale.
- Keep doing this until you feel calm. Breathe without pausing or holding your breath.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

Practise this relaxed breathing for three to five minutes, two to three times a day (or whenever you feel stressed). Once you have mastered this at home you can do this while with your horse. I get people to quietly walk with their horse using the counting their breathing technique. What they notice as they relax using their breathing exercise so does their horse. Breathing is invisible unless it's a really cold day. So a huge benefit as you can practice it and nobody will know what you are doing. It is a great technique to help centre and calm yourself, and your horse. A reminder that it is impossible to be stressed, anxious and tense at the same time as being relaxed. So maybe you are starting to see how this fits into building confidence for yourself and your horse. As a calm relaxed you and a calm relaxed horse is a wonderful place to be.



### **Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation Technique**

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the

body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Why this is good for horsemanship: We can easily spot a relaxed horse, muscles soft, eyes soft...etc. It's just as easy to spot a tense horse too. Muscle tension is part of their silent language of the herd to read body tension in their own species and others. The muscle tension or relaxation is alongside body language gestures. Their very survival was dependant on getting this right. Some are so subtle it is easy to miss. Horsemanship is about learning to read and understand this communication. For example a tense horse often has a tense jaw. So do people. For people a tense jaw here is an exercise to try: simply press on the roof of your mouth, behind your front teeth with your tongue then relax. A horse with a tense jaw is telling you he's not happy, he could be anxious, fearful, tense etc. The ethical response is to ask why and try to help your horse. Whole body tension is another you will see in horses that struggling, even very subtle tension if missed and you carry on can lead to an undesirable behaviour. Soft relaxed muscles in horse and rider = harmony and fluidity.



How about our own muscle relaxation? How aware are you of tension in your body? Did you know that your own body tension is strongly linked to our state of mind? The Deep Muscle Relaxation technique takes around 20 minutes. It works different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from the body and relax your mind.

### **How to:**

Find a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Get completely comfortable, either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing; breathing slowly and deeply, as described above. If you have pain in certain muscles, or if there are muscles that you find it difficult to focus on, spend more time on relaxing other parts. You may want to play some soothing music to help relaxation. As with all relaxation techniques, deep muscle relaxation will require a bit of practice before you start feeling its benefits. For each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat it a couple of times. It's useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups. Again if you can master this technique at home you can then take it with you when you are with your horse. I find it very useful when helping clients to find a soft, relaxed body and mind. It also helps people locate any areas of tension which in turn will disturb harmony in the saddle.

You can start from the top or from the toes. Here is from the toes up:

- Get comfortable. Take a few minutes to relax with your breathing technique.
- Pay attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10. Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose. Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- Pay attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through each part your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- So next is the Right calf
- Then Left calf
- Followed by Right thigh
- Then Left thigh
- Next Hips and buttocks
- Move onto the Stomach
- Then the Chest
- Move to the Back
- Then Right hand
- Followed by Left hand
- Next Right arm
- Move onto Left arm
- Followed by the Neck and shoulders
- And finally the Face.



It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

\* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

### **Body Scan Technique**

A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Any area we carry tension will affect our horsemanship both on the ground and ridden. Our horse can read our body tension. In the saddle it can block our communication and our horse will feel we are not fluid so it can cause our horse to brace, fix and resist.

#### **How to:**

- Get comfortable.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot.
- After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg.
- From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders.
- Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
- Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and shoulder.
- Repeat for your left arm.
- Then move through the neck and throat.
- Finally all the regions of your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.
- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.



## Visualization Technique

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. You can choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it's a tropical beach, a favourite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, or with a therapist, or an audio recording of a therapist guiding you through the imagery. To help you employ your sense of hearing you can use a sound machine or download sounds that match your chosen setting—the sound of ocean waves if you've chosen a beach, for example.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Once you can master visualization you can use it in horsemanship. Here is an example: you could worry about any number of outside influences affecting your riding. Left unchecked your imagination can create all sorts of scenarios and nightmares of what may happen. Result is you become tense, anxious, fearful, etc. You can use the power of your imagination positively too. For sure you should be aware of your environment for safety sake but no more. Here is a visualization I use: Imagine you and your horse are in a beautiful peaceful clear bubble, you can see through it and all your senses are not affected. Things on the outside of this bubble can only come in if you let them. And you're not going to let them in. Practice being calm and relaxed in your bubble and enjoy being in there with your horse. It's just you and your horse and beautiful relaxing things in with you. The rest of the world is outside. Live in the moment (there is a technique for living in the moment covered later) so if trouble comes towards your bubble, only then do you have to deal with it. When you are calm and relaxed in your bubble you will be able to calmly and confidently deal with whatever approaches you. The benefit is you will not mentally leave your horse, you will stay more connected, be more in control and be happier.

### How to:

- Find a quiet, relaxed place.
- Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.
- If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example: Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colours and textures around you. Spend some time exploring each of your senses. See the sun setting over the water. Hear the birds singing. Smell the pine trees. Feel the cool water on your bare feet. Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present. Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.

## Mindfulness Technique



Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external. It is about living in the here and now. Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance. Mindfulness can be applied to day to day activities such as walking, exercising, eating, etc.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Horses live much more than we do in the here and now. Yes they carry memories positive and negative which the negative experiences can cause them stress when exposed to similar situations. However the difference is they tend not to dwell on it and it tends to surface much more in reaction to what is happening to them in a here and now. Our job is to help our horse to be emotionally balanced and to be able to cope with those issues.

### How to:

- Choose a secluded place with no distractions or interruptions.
- Get comfortable.
- Select a point of focus. This point can be internal – a feeling or imaginary scene – or something external - a flame, a beautiful stone, or meaningful word or phrase that you repeat it throughout your session.
- You can do this with eyes open or closed.
- An observant, noncritical attitude. Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don't fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.



## Rhythmic Exercise Technique

Running, horse riding, walking, cycling etc... can relieve stress when performed with relaxation in mind. You must be fully engaged in the present moment, focusing your mind on how your body feels right now. As you exercise, focus on the physicality of your body's movement and how your breathing complements that movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement.

Why this is good for horsemanship: A great one to do in the saddle it unlocks levels of refinement in horsemanship. As you can connect with your horse, how its body moves, its foot fall, its energy, and emotional state of mind. You can learn to move as one. With groundwork your horse will tap into rhythm, you can influence your horse's rhythm with your own. Horses are hard wired to read rhythm and will love to take direction from very subtle rhythmic changes. Learning to use rhythm in relaxing with your horse adds a whole new dimension to your horsemanship.

### How to:

- Let's pick walking. You can do this easily and once mastered have a go with your horse in hand.
- Start with your breathing exercise.
- Then focus on each step.
- The physical sensations of your feet touching the ground and how your body moves.
- Notice the rhythm of your breathing while moving.
- Relaxed people walked relaxed. Practice walking relaxed. Mosey along.
- Get into a relaxed rhythm. The pace you move at has a direct relationship with the way you feel. Slow down your movements and you will feel more relaxed.
- Enjoy the feeling of the wind against your face, if you're lucky the sun on your back.
- Notice the beautiful sounds of birds, wind in the trees etc.

The trick is to make relaxation techniques a part of your life and valuing relaxation. The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is to incorporate it into your daily routine. Between work, family, school, and other commitments, though, it can be tough for many people to find the time. Fortunately, many of the techniques can be practiced while you're doing other things. I haven't covered every technique so there are lots more you can try.

## Thoughts to Ponder

- Worry when the time comes. Most worries are about future concerns that may or may not happen. Concentrate on the here and now.
- Prune or banish pressure phrases. Phrases like 'I have to' 'I must' 'I should' fuel pressure and stress. Listen to your words and thoughts and replace them with more relaxed phrases 'I may' 'I choose to' 'I will make time to' etc...
- Watch out for tense people. Time spent with tense anxious people can be infectious.
- Know when to stop. If stress levels are rising, stop, take a break, do something else.
- Make peace with imperfection. It's ok for things to not be perfect. The perfection stick is one we beat ourselves with and it is highly damaging.
- Be aware of your thinking and use it positively.
- Be more patient.
- Surrender to the fact life isn't fair.
- Allow yourself to be bored.
- Lower your tolerance to stress. You were not put on this earth to live under stress, learn to say no.
- Most things are not an emergency.
- Look beyond your horse's behaviour and ask why.
- Seek to understand.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Practice being calm and relaxed – being the eye in the storm.
- Be flexible with your plans.
- Think as problems as golden opportunities in works clothing.
- Cut yourself and your horse some slack.
- Ask yourself what is a meaningful accomplishment from my horse's view point.
- Listen to your gut instinct and your feelings. If something doesn't feel right the chances are it isn't.
- If someone throws you a ball you don't have to catch it.
- It takes time. Things will only happen at a pace you and your horse are comfortable with.
- Lighten up and have fun. Smile. A smile is relaxing and helps you to feel good.

These relaxation resources are not a replacement for professional support. They are designed to be used alongside regular lessons from a professional horsemanship practitioner. Horses that struggle to relax, that are tense, anxious, fearful, stressed, etc can be unpredictable and dangerous.



## **Make it Fun**

Owning a horse should be fun for both you and the horse. Often it is far from being fun when you or your horse suffers from a lack of confidence. It is important for both horse and human to look forward to being in each other's company and to enjoy the activities they do together. Often we get hung up on being serious around horses, and forget how to have fun.

Place first on your list just enjoying each other's company. Often we place so much emphasis on getting chores done, grooming, riding etc that we forget that there are so many ways we can enjoy being with our

horses. Have you ever spent time just being with your horse doing nothing much in-particular? E.g. just hanging around and watching him in his herd? Sit in the corner of his stable while he happily munches on his hay? Gone for a walk in hand so he can pick on sweet grass? Given your horse a relaxing massage? Etc.... If you are looking for ideas for fun activities that are not about riding check out the library of resources on the Non Ridden Equine Association UK website:

<https://www.thenonriddenequineassociationuk.org/resource-library.html>

Some quality time out of the saddle can really boost confidence and build a stronger partnership which can have huge benefits for riding too. Putting your relationship with your horse first is another great way of you learning about your horse and him learning about you. A great deal of fun can be had on the ground playing games with your horse. From this you will learn what your horse enjoys and finds rewarding.

Having fun with our horses relies on both horse and human doing the things we enjoy, we find easy, working in our comfort areas and being creative about extending these activities. Your comfort zone exercises will help you greatly identify activities you both enjoy. The trick is to then get creative and extend what and how you do these activities.

## **Cognitive Behavioural Techniques**

Cognitive behavioural techniques help you to change how you think (cognitive) and what and how you do things (behaviour). By using cognitive behavioural techniques will help you to understand how the way you think affects you physically and emotionally. How you think about situations / difficulties / problems will in turn dictate how you feel, what you do and the outcome.

### **Why is cognitive behaviour useful in building a good relationship with a horse?**

When working with horses we need to understand what it means to be a horse, therefore natural horsemanship and human cognitive behaviour need to be interwoven and balanced. When you are building your confidence or supporting a horse with confidence issues understanding and applying cognitive behavioural techniques will help you to become aware of reasoning and allows you to take control in a direct and targeted way. It helps you to identify your personal goals, to then develop an action plan with strategies. As with all good plans you need to monitor and evaluate progress, and be willing to adjust goals and time limits.

The skill of learning and applying cognitive behavioural techniques to your horsemanship has far wider benefits as it enables you to tackle many life problems by harnessing your own inner resources.



### **What are the benefits of using cognitive behavioural techniques?**

- It can help you to make sense of overwhelming problems
- You can challenge negative thinking
- Help you understand biological responses in relation to stress, anxiety and fear
- Challenge common thinking distortions
- Consider more useful ways of dealing with difficulties
- Plan for success, with realistic aims that are in line with your values
- Be aware of your strengths, skills and talents
- Become more purposeful
- Skills learnt you can apply in a number of settings not just with horses
- Builds confidence and self esteem
- It helps you regain perspective and control

### **An Unfair Label for Your Horse?**

As an instructor I was called upon to help people with horses with behaviour problems of one sort or another. The one thing most of these situations have in common is the horse has been labelled and this has a very narrowing effect on how people approach situations with the horse and the relationship between horse and human becomes restricted. Often I see the owner trying very hard to work within an increasingly smaller comfort zone. Or the owner feels out their depth and is fast losing confidence too. Many horse and rider partnerships reach a crisis point and help is looked for as a last resort.

Maybe you know someone who owns or you own a horse with a label. I certainly was one of those who owned a labelled “problem and dangerous” horse. I purchased Merlot to get him out of a bad place where he was being very badly treated. The years of abuse had turned him into an aggressive, bad tempered and dangerous horse. It was clear to me that he was not a “problem and dangerous” horse but a horse with broken trust in humans and his confidence in tatters. In the early days other people around our yard saw a “problem dangerous” horse on the edge. They gave him the label for good reason as he scared many of them. The work I have done with Merlot has helped him to overcome his lack of trust in humans, he looks forward to his human arriving. This along with building his confidence has resulted in a happy horse with a strong positive relationship with me. I would love to share with you Merlot’s journey in more detail, however this could be a book on its own. Maybe one day I will write this to share the many useful insights and his confidence journey.



I ask you to challenge your thinking about labelled horses. What are these horses trying to communicate? What help do they need? Some are in physical pain, others are in emotional pain, many lack confidence, some are in fear etc. In my experience they are communicating clearly they need help of some sort. However their behaviour can scare their human, and lead to the owner to losing confidence. With professional support, equine compassion, time and patience these horses can be turned around. To resolve confidence issues with a horse should never be taken on lightly. In in-experienced hands it can lead to disaster. Therefore the owner needs to be dedicated, have a strong motivation to learn new skills from a professional, be open minded, and allow as much time as the horse needs.

What labels have you given your horse? Or have others given your horse?



### **An Unfair Label for You?**

We have considered horses with labels, now consider the labels or statements we attach to ourselves. As with the horses I go out to help I have riders with their development restricted with a label they have placed on themselves. Or other people have labelled them and if people allow themselves to take on the label they wear it. These labels may also have foundations in a previous a bad experience, which then leads to a lack of confidence, anxiety and fear. Here are a few examples of rider restricting labels or statements “I am not good enough for my horse” “I can’t do that” “It is beyond my reach to do dressage” “I can’t ride on my own” “I can’t cope” “I am not great at learning new things” “I feel stupid, why can’t I just get on and do it” “I am never going to be any good” etc...

What labels have you given yourself? Or have other people given you a label?

Labelling or self-defeating statements are part of negative inner dialogue.

### **Negative Inner Dialogue**

Self-defeating statements and negative inner dialogue erode confidence and in turn make our dreams seem out of reach. Many people will look to prove and argue their self-created label is true. Then their head is filled with limitations that frighten them and prevent them from trying to resolve the problem. To the person these feelings are real and very restricting. Negative inner dialogue eats away at a person’s self-esteem and confidence. At the heart of the negative inner dialogue are central beliefs about yourself and the kind of person you are. These are more than likely opinions about your-self rather than based on facts.

These negative opinions about yourself are often based on negative experiences you have had during your life.

### **What are the barriers to challenging these negative opinions?**

- Low self-esteem
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Feeling in-effective
- Lack of confidence
- Fear of failure
- Errors in thinking
- Irrational beliefs
- Fear of criticism
- Other people's expectations etc.

### **How to challenge your negative inner dialogue**

- Be open about your negative inner dialogue and fears.
- Become a detective. What concrete evidence do you have to support your thinking? What evidence do you have against this thinking?
- Stand outside the situation. What alternative views are there? How would your friends view this situation? How would you have viewed this in the past? How would your professional instructor view the situation?
- What effect does your negative thinking have on what you want to achieve? Does it help you, or hinder? And how?
- Do you have errors in your thinking?
  - a) Are you catastrophizing? Are you overestimating the chances for a negative outcome or disaster?
  - b) Are you focusing on the negatives? Are you looking at just the bad side of things? Have you ignored your strengths and what you are good at? Have you forgotten all the things that have gone well?
  - c) Are you jumping to conclusions? Are you trying to predict the future? How can you be 100% sure it will be the same in the future?
  - d) Are you seeing the world in terms of fixed or in-flexible rules? Are you worried about how things should be? Do you find yourself using words like should, must and can't?
  - e) Are you thinking in black and white or all or nothing terms? Have you ignored the shades of grey and the middle ground?
  - f) Are you personalizing? Are you blaming yourself for something that is not your fault?
- What action can you take to challenge your negative inner dialogue? Are you overlooking solutions to the problem assuming they will not work? If you do the same you will get the same. Is there a different way around your problem? Are you open to trying a new or different approach? Have you asked for help?
- What is the worst that can happen? Talk to your instructor about these fears with the aim to put in place a structured plan.

## An Exercise to Challenge Negative Thoughts and Your Labels

Write down your negative thoughts or the labels you have given yourself or your horse and then write in the column next to it how you can challenge these thoughts. I have listed just a few examples to help get you started.

Negative Thought	Challenge
I am not good enough.	None of us are perfect. I am good at certain things and other areas I am not so good. I can work on these to learn new skills and to improve.
Everyone else on my yard finds it easy, has a better time than me and they are happy with their horse.	Do you know this for a fact? Just because they appear busy and getting on with things doesn't mean they are happier or more satisfied. They may be experiencing problems but just not say anything. Or in the past they may have experienced problems.
I feel out of my depth, I am hopeless. My horse doesn't even listen to me.	Totally condemning my-self is not productive. Take one step at a time and one day at a time. I can overcome my problems and difficulties with my horse by learning new skills and by practicing what I have learnt.
What if I make a mistake? Would it ruin everything?	Part of learning is about making mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. It is ok to make mistakes. The key is to learn by them and to move forward.
My horse is naughty and dangerous.	My horse may have challenging behaviour at the moment. I can learn how best to help him do the right thing and become a willing partner.

Are the original labels you gave yourself and your horse fair? Did allowing negative inner dialogue in cloud your judgement? Start today to challenge the negative inner dialogue and the labels we attach to ourselves and our horses.

## What is Confidence?

Confident people are:-

- ✓ In control of their own life.
- ✓ Comfortable with being who they are.
- ✓ Able to put across information so they can be understood.
- ✓ Able to say what they feel.
- ✓ Comfortable in saying no.
- ✓ Honest with themselves and others.
- ✓ Courageous in trying new things.
- ✓ Able to accept responsibility for their actions.
- ✓ Balanced in their outlook.

Confident people:-

- ✓ Have belief in them-selves.
- ✓ Learn from mistakes.
- ✓ Plan for success.
- ✓ Learn new skills.
- ✓ See problems as challenges

## How can you become more confident?

- Focus on what you and your horse are good at. The exercise of using the comfort zone lists is very useful in building confidence. Look at what you and your horse have achieved and the things you have done that you are proud of. Use this as a spring board for future improvements.
- Cut yourself some slack and stop being hard on yourself. It is ok to make mistakes, it is normal, everyone makes mistakes.
- Recognize what areas you want to improve upon and take positive steps towards learning new techniques, gaining skills and practice. This helps you to overcome your weaknesses.
- If you feel you or your horse have failed, try to evaluate what happened in an objective and positive way. Often it is helpful to get professional advice at this stage. This then gives you the opportunity to see this in a positive light and as a learning opportunity for you and your horse.
- When you are given compliments / praise, accept them. When we lack confidence we tend to dismiss compliments / praise and not see from another person's perspective something that is good.
- Criticism is hard to take when you lack confidence. Valid constructive criticism can be very helpful to help you open the door for change. Try to take on board constructive criticism, ask questions to gain clarification if needed.
- It is ok to say what you think / feel. It is ok to say what you need / want. Open yourself up and express yourself. Your feelings / thoughts / needs are just as important as anyone else's.
- Be realistic about setting your goals. Be well prepared, plan for success. Take your time. Work at your and your horse's pace. Take it one step at a time. And be mindful of chasing moonbeams and spiky profiles.
- Surround yourself with friends / people who are positive and can offer reassurance. Track down an instructor who you and your horse feel comfortable with who can support you and your horse in overcoming your fears, and help you to try out more things.
- Believe in yourself and your horse.

## What is Low Self-Esteem?

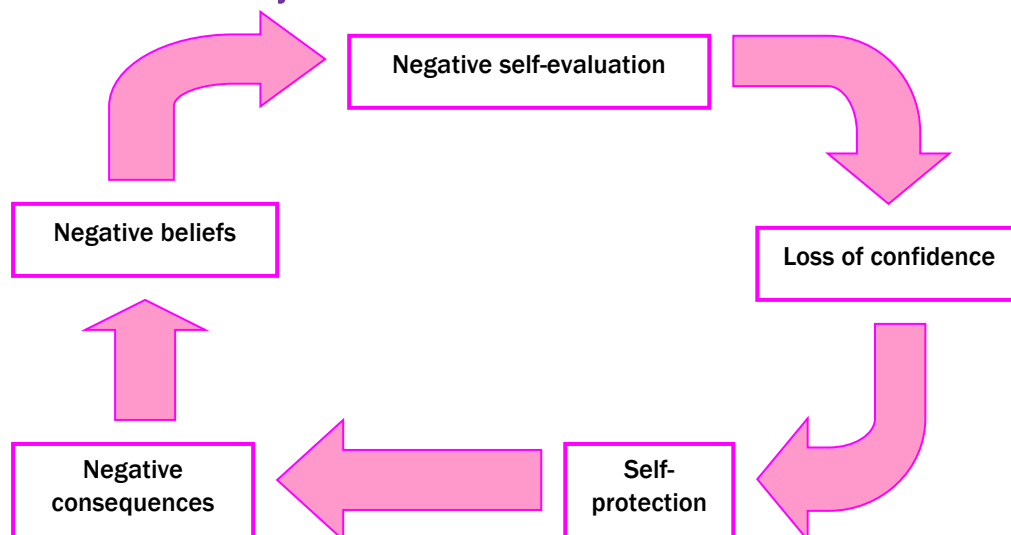
People who lack confidence often have low self-esteem. As lack of confidence and self-esteem are very closely interlinked.

Self-esteem is:-

- The overall opinion we hold of ourselves.
- How we judge ourselves.
- The value we place on ourselves.
- Core ideas we hold about what type of person we think we are.
- The beliefs we hold about ourselves.
- Our self-worth.

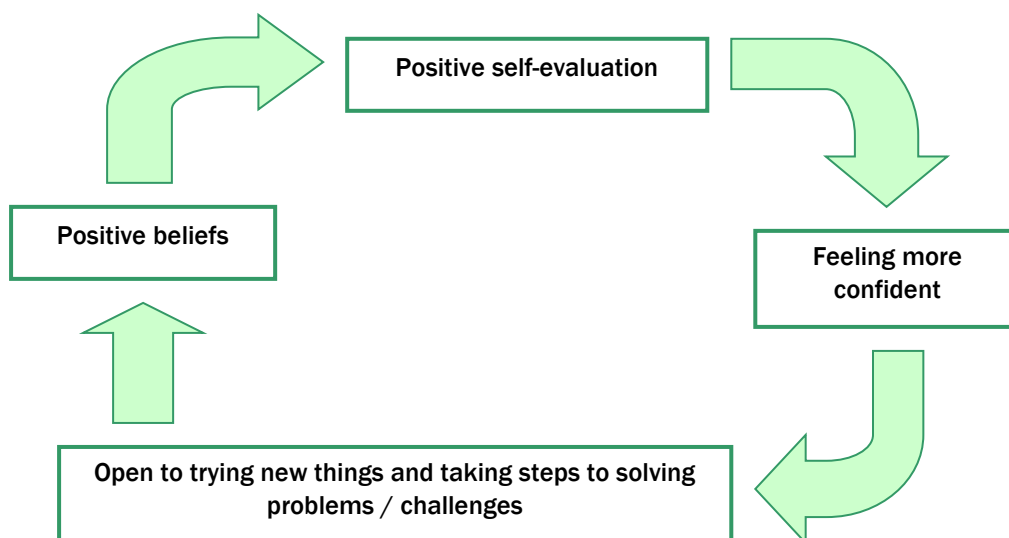
We often think these are facts, statements of truths about ourselves. However they are likely to be only opinions. They are conclusions you have arrived at based upon life experiences. So if you have had a life that on the whole provided you with positive experiences your beliefs about yourself are likely to be positive. If your life experiences have been negative then it is likely your beliefs about yourself will be negative. To break out of the cycle of low self-esteem you firstly need to become aware of the cycle and then you can take steps to break free.

### The Low Self-Esteem Cycle



To break free from a cycle of low self-esteem you can start at any point on the cycle. For example you could choose to start with the negative self-evaluation, and focus on the positive things about you. Using your comfort zone box is a very good starting point for examining what you are good at. Look at what you and your horse have achieved and the things you have done that you are proud of. Or you could choose the loss of confidence and evaluate what happened in an objective and positive way. Often it is helpful to get professional advice at this stage. This then gives you the opportunity to see this in a positive light and as a learning opportunity for you and your horse. Or you could open yourself up to new experiences and challenges so tackling self-protection and negative consequences. Or you could examine your negative beliefs and use the tools this pack in the negative inner dialogue section to help you challenge your thinking and replace these negative thoughts with positive statements.

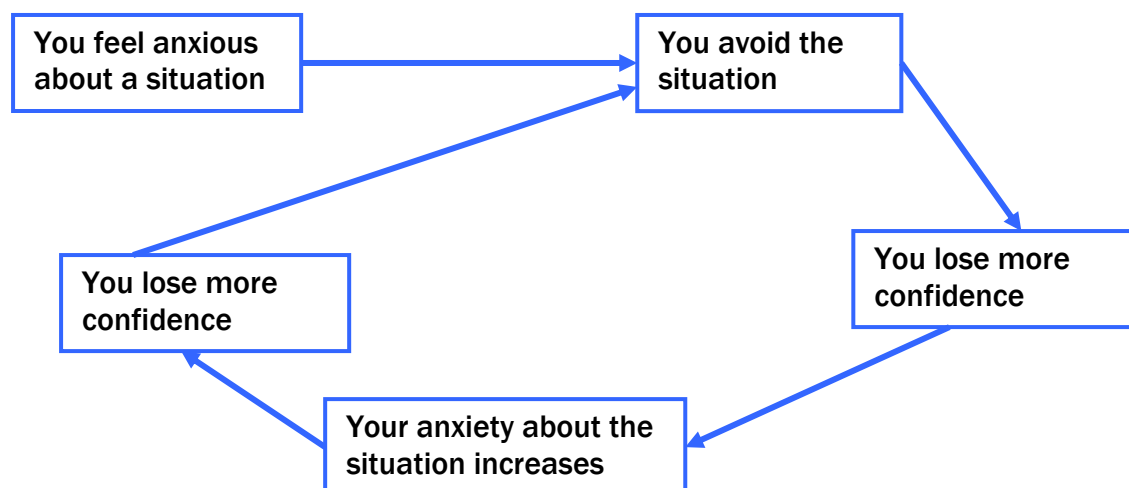
## Positive Cycle of Self-Esteem



## What is the Anxiety Response?

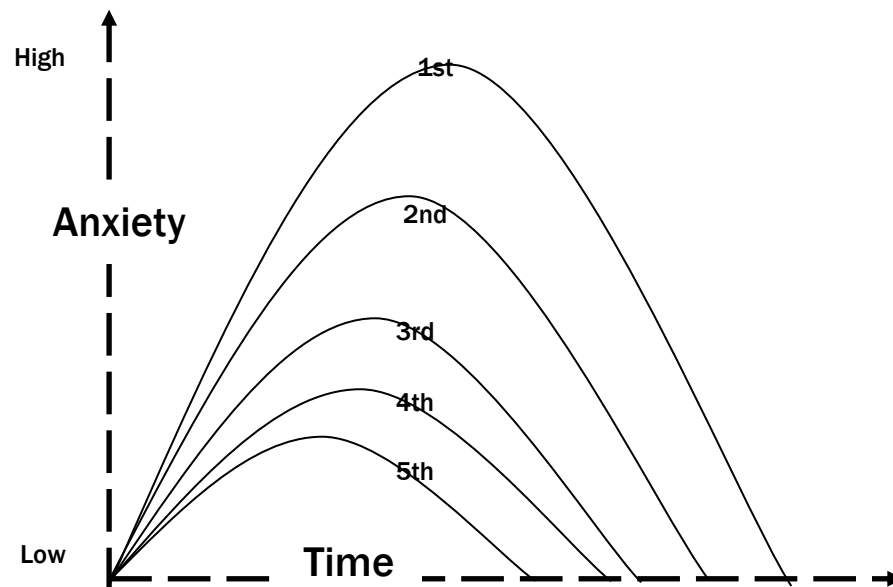
### The Cycle of Anxiety and Confidence

We have explored how the impact of negative inner dialogue and low self-esteem erodes confidence. It is essential to explore anxiety as confidence and anxiety are very closely interlinked with often blurred boundaries. Anxiety reduces our confidence levels, making doing tasks we once found easy hard. The cycle of anxiety and loss confidence feed into each other and it becomes a vicious cycle that is hard to break free from.



It is a natural reaction to avoid situations that make us feel anxious / fearful. The natural response when exposed to a fearful situation is flight, fight or freeze, an evolutionary survival reaction. Both horse and human possess this survival reaction and it can be triggered by real threats and perceived threats to our well-being.

Human or horse if forced to stay and face a fearful / anxiety producing situation their anxiety levels will go up high, reach a plateau of panic and then go down again. Horses and humans behaviour to fear / anxiety can be different. Fearful / anxious / horses panic and become un-predictable and very dangerous. Therefore it is essential you get professional help if your horse is prone to anxiety and panics. The first time you or your horse faces a fearful situation the anxiety levels will be very high and will take a longer time to subside. The second time in the same situation the anxiety will be less severe and fall in a shorter time. The diagram below shows how the anxiety gets less and will take a shorter length of time to subside each time.



The best way of overcoming anxiety and or loss of confidence is by tackling your or your horse's fears one step at a time in easy to achieve stages. Not by asking you or your horse to face a situation that would cause a high level of anxiety or a full blown panic attack. By using a graded exposure technique which helps to gradually desensitize you or your horse. The aim is not to push yourself or your horse into a high level of anxiety as this is counter-productive. As facing a fear to an extreme when working with horses is very dangerous and can have very negative outcomes. Never work at a level that pushes you or your horse's anxiety levels beyond comfortable limits. For horses we need to encourage him / her to think rather than react, by using graded exposure and desensitization. By confronting anxiety in small steps, time and time again the anxiety will reduce and confidence will grow. It is essential not to over-face horse or human. It is strongly advised you seek professional support. It is essential to start with the easiest and smallest step first. When building your or your horse's confidence with your instructor you will need a plan of action and you should be open minded as you will learn a range of techniques / tactics / skills.



## **Bodily Response to Anxiety**

When we or our horse become anxious automatic bodily responses kick in to prepare our bodies for action. I am sure you are familiar with the flight or fight or freeze response. This is a deeply embedded survival response. It is the same response in both horse and human. The fight or flight or freeze response is a reaction to a perception of a threat. Today human and horse are very rarely faced with life threatening situations that our evolutionary past has biologically prepared us for. However this biological response is deeply embedded within us all. It can be triggered by a range of situations, some we may not even be aware of. The bodily response is very similar for all animals, as it prepares the body for a sudden burst of energy for action.

The brain sends messages of the perceived or actual threat to the body and adrenalin is pumped into the blood stream. The heart beats faster and the lungs need to take in more oxygen. The body needs to cool down so sweat is produced and the blood capillaries come to the skin surface. The body will prepare to run by becoming lighter, so going to the toilet is often necessary. These are very natural physical symptoms in relation to flight, fight or freeze. When this reaction happens in an everyday environment at an inappropriate moment because our mind has perceived a situation to be threatening it can be very scary.

There are three parts to the anxiety feeling for both horse and human they are:-

- 1) **The physical bodily response:** Energy comes up (sometimes very quickly); faster heart rate, irregular breathing, churning stomach / sick feeling, sweating, trembling, and the need to go to the toilet.
- 2) **Behaviour:** This is about the response to the anxiety. This includes avoiding the situation, horse and human don't allow themselves to experience what causes them to feel anxious or by getting out of the situation as soon possible.
- 3) **Thinking:** This about the cycle of thinking about what may happen to you in a given situation. Here horse and human base what may happen from previous experiences, ideas and beliefs and create a fear about a situation that is often far worse than the reality.

Anxiety greatly reduces confidence because it makes it very difficult to do things we once found very easy. Both horse and human can be caught up in a cycle of feeling anxious that makes them physically feel terrible. Then they avoid the situations that cause them to feel anxious. Or they try to face their anxiety but then have to get out the situation as soon as possible. Or their thinking creates an image in their mind that things are far worse than the reality. This compounds their lack of confidence that then feeds into them becoming more anxious. You can take back control by breaking this cycle by learning how to cope better with the feelings of anxiety. There are some tips on the following pages for you to consider and test run so you can discover which ones work best for you. It is essential when building confidence that you work to a realistic plan with easy to achieve graded exposure small steps. Each of these graded exposure small challenges will help you and or your horse gain confidence.



## Tips to Help Manage Anxiety

### Identify What Worries You and Your Horse

When we feel anxious it is sometimes hard to pinpoint exactly what is causing us to worry and become anxious. However to deal with anxiety it is helpful to bring out into the open what is worrying you. It can be a half formed idea or a nagging doubt that keeps running around in your mind becoming a bigger and bigger worry. You can break this cycle by getting out into the open what worries you. It takes away a lot of the pressure and enables you to then take steps in dealing with your worries.

Horses can worry and become anxious; our job is to help our horse overcome the worry and anxiety. Again the first stage is to identify what is worrying your horse. Again by recognising what causes the anxiety we can then take steps to help deal with the anxiety. So pay attention to your horse, watch his body language, energy, reactions and you will soon be able to identify what worries your horse.

### Look for Evidence

By checking out evidence for the cause of the anxiety we can be sure we are not jumping to assumptions. Jot down evidence for both sides of the argument and review the information you have gathered. Getting an objective professional view point is also very useful at this stage. Now you can rate how much you believe your anxiety / worry to be true. Often this simple exercise alone is enough for you to see some things that were causing anxiety are not as bad as you first thought. It helps you to gain perspective and see a positive way forward.

### Explore the Outcome

Many of us get caught in our anxious thinking and focus on the worst possible outcome. This thinking can become far from reality and the fantasy is usually far worse than the reality. An example: This is how your imagination may take over. Imagine you and your horse are expected to go into an unknown indoor school at night that is very dim with no lights on. You may feel anxious as you would not be able to see what is in the school, what may spook your horse. You may start to imagine all sorts of things waiting for you in the dark. More often than not our imagination will create a fantasy that is far worse than the reality. This is when we need to be realistic about the worst possible outcome, be aware of how our thinking can distort reality.

### Other View Points

How would someone else view the situation? What advice would they give? Again this is about checking your thinking as when we are caught in a loop of anxious thinking perspective and realities are easily lost. It is very useful to check out and compare your view point with people you respect and a professional instructor.

### Ten Years' Time

Ask yourself will this worry / anxiety matter in ten years' time? Looking from a distance can help you see what you think are mountains are molehills.



### **Distorted Thinking**

Check your thinking about the situation. Example: Are you thinking in all or nothing terms? Do you think in terms of total failure or total success?

If you are you will be missing the middle ground.

Progress should be measured on a scale say between 0% and 100%. Keeping a perspective can really help you deal with worries and anxiety.

### **Pack up Your Worries**

If your anxious thoughts keep going round and round in your head you will find it impossible to even start to solve the problem. So try packing them away and allow yourself a specific set aside time to deal with them one at a time. If you can change your thought process to being one from being worried / anxious about a situation / problem to one of when the time is right I will

tackle each problem one at a time and one step at a time. You can start to see them as challenges rather than worries.

### **Safe Graded Exposure**

Once you know what troubles you and or your horse you can work on using a planned safe graded exposure technique. An example of this is below. You need to work within levels that you or your horse are comfortable with and repeat the exercises several times until anxiety begins to subside. Also be prepared to try different approaches as there are always many solutions to solving problems. If the step you are trying to achieve is too big be prepared to break it down into even smaller steps.

### **Take Action**

One of the best ways to tackle worries and anxiety is to take steps in solving your problems. Worries and anxiety can spur you on a journey of self-discovery and new learning. There are many ways you can change your situation. The first step is to recognise something has to change. If you do the same you will get the same. Are you ready to try a new approach? Are you prepared to work with an instructor?

### **Relaxation Techniques**

Using a relaxation technique is very helpful when breaking the anxiety cycle. You cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. There are many different techniques you can learn. And it is personal choice as to which you may find the most effective. Here I will give you just a few ideas; there are relaxing breathing techniques, progressive muscular relaxation techniques, mental relaxation techniques, guided imagery techniques etc. Relaxing breaks the cycle of anxiety as it slows the body's systems. And like all new skills the more you practice it the better you will get at being relaxed. So this skill is very useful to learn for everyday life too. Our job is to help our horses to relax.

## Exercise to Manage Anxiety

Write the Worry / Anxiety Here:

Your notes	
<b>Identify the Worry</b>	
<b>What is the Evidence</b>	
<b>Explore the Outcome</b>	
<b>Other View Points</b>	
<b>Ten Years' Time</b>	
<b>Distorted Thinking</b>	
<b>Pack up Your Worries</b>	
<b>Safe Graded Exposure</b>	
<b>Take Action</b>	
<b>Relaxation Techniques</b>	

### **Case Study of Graded Exposure - Tractors and Farm Machinery**

I moved my horses to a working farm. The farmer Mr Palmer loves tractors, so there was lots of big farm machinery about the place. The first stage to help my horses feel comfortable with the farm machinery was to allow them to inspect it while it was parked. Over several consecutive days I worked with my horses keeping my energy low and myself between the horse and the machinery and gradually encouraging my horse closer and closer to the machinery. All the time I read my horse's anxiety through his energy and body language and I was very mindful to never push my horse closer to the machinery than he was happy with. It only took a very short while for my horses to get curious and want to sniff and inspect the machinery. Their fear had been replaced with "what is it?" The next stage was for them to see and hear the machinery working. This was easy as their paddock was right next to the biggest machine on the farm, a huge bright yellow lime spreader. So they could train themselves without needing my support. The first day the lime spreader was started up the horses got worried and went to the far end of their paddock and watched from a safe distance. And this went on for several days. Each day their reaction got less and the distance they felt they needed to be from the lime spreader got less. The day soon came when they stood by the gate watching the lime spreader start up and drive away. It wasn't long after that that they didn't even bother to lift up their heads from the grass when the lime spreader went out.

**I have written a FREE download Banish Anxiety – Horsemanship and Beyond which you can download for FREE from my website.**

<https://www.vickijayneates.co.uk/horsemanship-resources.html>

### **What is Stress?**

Sadly our fast paced world puts many of us under a great deal of stress. To afford to own a horse many of us work long hours in stressful jobs and juggle raising a family. This stress often leaks out into other parts of our lives. How many times have you arrived at your horse feeling stressed by the day's events? How does that effect your enjoyment of your time spent with your horse? How does your horse react to your stress? How does stress affect you? Many of us do not recognize how stressed we are until we reach a crisis point.

Stress is an imbalance between the demands upon us and our resources to deal with these demands. Some stress is beneficial for us. It is when we are pushed beyond what we can cope with that problems arise. Negative stress can have many undesirable effects. Emotionally we can become anxious, depressed, tense, nervous, apathetic, moody, prone to over re-acting etc. Mentally we can find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions or turn off. We can mentally become more self-critical, obsessive, sensitive to criticism etc. It can play havoc with our physical health too, many health problems are made worse because of stress some of these include headaches, skin rashes / eczema, stomach ulcers, heart conditions, high blood pressure etc. Behaviourally we can have difficulty sleeping, suffer emotional outbursts, feel irritated or angry, avoid situations, become restless etc. Stress can also impact on our ability to perform tasks to the standards we can usually achieve.



Some stress is good for us. Learn to recognise your limits and don't allow yourself to be pressured into going beyond these limits. On the next page are some tips to help you deal with stress.

Horses can also suffer from stress. Again it is when the balance of the demands placed upon them is more than the resources they have to cope with the demands. When stressed horses can emotionally become anxious, depressed, tense, nervous,

apathetic, moody, prone to over re-acting etc. Mentally they can find it difficult to concentrate. Prolonged stress can play havoc with their physical health too. Prolonged stress can change a horse's behaviour, they can have difficulty settling, develop stable vices, become irritable or angry, avoid situations etc. Stress can also impact on our horse's ability to perform tasks.

To support our horse it is essential we are observant to the factors that may cause our horse stress. What is stressful to one horse may not be so stressful for another. So get to know your own horse with the aim to reduce the stresses in your horse's life. The action we take to support our horse in dealing with stress would depend on what is causing the stress.

### **A Few Tips for Dealing with Stress**

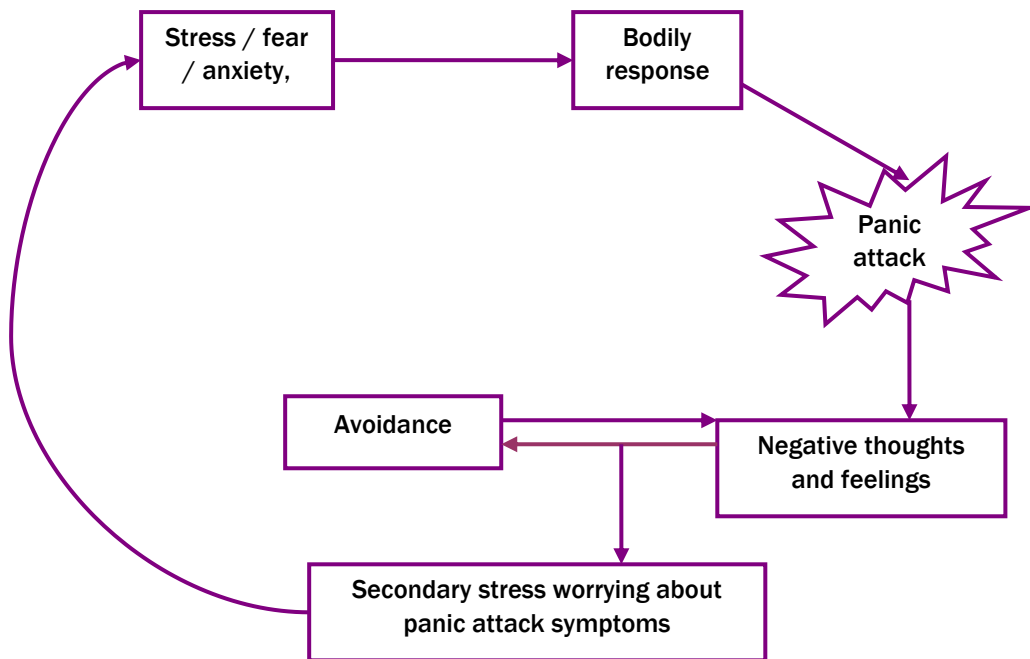
- Recognise the effect stress has on you and your horse. Learn to listen to stress levels within yourself and your horse. Don't allow yourself or your horse to be pushed beyond your limits.
- Look after yourself and your horse, physically and mentally.
- Learn to relax and encourage your horse to relax.
- Identify and define stressful problems and deal with them one at a time.
- Break down tasks into manageable chunks.
- Don't rush. Work at a pace that is good for you and your horse.
- Accept feelings.
- For humans learn to say no – be assertive. For your horse recognise when he is saying no because he feels stressed.
- Plan in advance and set realistic goals.
- Dump being a perfectionist.
- Ask for help and accept help when offered.
- Open up and talk to people you trust.
- Make time to do things you both enjoy.
- Make time for reviewing progress and goals.
- Stop expecting too much from yourself or your horse.

## What is Panic?

Panic attacks are common in both humans and horses. I am sure you will have seen a horse panic and maybe experienced the feeling of panic yourself. Panic is the result of a sudden onset of very intense apprehension, terror, or fear. Here is an example you may be able to relate to: You and your horse are out riding and something suddenly pops out of the hedge and scares your horse, he leaps sideways then runs at top speed for a short distance. As he does his best to save himself from what he thinks is sure death from a horse eating monster you feel the saddle slip a little. Your heart would pound, your breathing would alter, you may go very pale etc. However when you both stop and recognised you were both safe but nearly had a nasty accident your anxiety would die down. You see this is a very natural response to the situation.



However we can experience the panic feelings in situations that are not life threatening. When we suffer from prolonged stress, anxiety, worrying thoughts, etc our fear reaction can become oversensitive. And then we find ourselves prone to panic in ordinary situations. This is the same for horses too. We can become trapped in a cycle. You imagine something is wrong, or something bad may happen, which causes you to feel slightly fearful / anxious / stressed, which in turns starts to trigger the bodily reactions and then you start to feel panic. Then you have negative thoughts and feelings that may cause you to avoid situations and or cause you even more stress as you start to worry about the panic attack and the loss of control you feel. This then feeds into the stress / fear / anxiety you had been feeling.



### Some Tips to Help with Coping with Panic

- Panic feelings are normal feelings that have become misplaced
- The feelings will pass
- Accepting the feelings helps the panic to pass more quickly
- Don't fight the panic, wait for it to pass
- Try to reduce your energy
- Consciously try to relax

If your horse panics you must put your safety first. The panic response is natural reaction that is misplaced and his panic will pass naturally. Never get in the path or in the way of a horse that is having a panic attack. Wait for your horse to come out of his panic by himself. You can help your horse from a safe distance out of his panic attack by remaining calm, keeping your energy low and talking to him in a relaxing and calming voice. Long term to deal with panic attacks you need to focus on dealing with the causes of the stress / anxiety / fear.

### What is Fear?

Fear is there for a reason, to protect us from harm and keep us safe. It is a natural feeling for human and horse. Tune into your fears they are telling you very important messages. There are two types of fear, a true fear and a perceived fear and they both feel emotionally and physically exactly the same. A true fear is telling you not to do something as it is very dangerous. For example: Handling an out of control horse is dangerous and yes you should feel fearful if you don't have extensive experience, skills and knowledge to deal with the situation. The fear in this situation is telling you not to go there the fear is going to keep you from harm. Don't ignore your instincts. A perceived fear feels as bad as a real fear, as our mind has taken a situation that is not life threatening or dangerous and perceived it to be a threat and danger. Your body and mind prepare you to take action to keep you safe.



This sounds so easy when you read this on paper. However in real life how many times have you felt the pressure to face your fear and do it anyway? We tend to pressure ourselves by comparing ourselves to other people. Or think that our fears are not valid or justified. Or we are being silly. Or that you should be able to do whatever causes you to feel fearful. Then into the mix is the help from others who could be giving you good or bad advice. Your gut feeling tells you not to do it but you do it anyway and you still don't feel any better in fact it can feel worse. So overriding your fear can be at best un-helpful and at worst dangerous. Trapped in this cycle you can soon become incapacitated by your fear. The sooner you start to listen to your fears, real or perceived the sooner you can take control, take the steps that feel right for you. Remember fear is a biological response there to keep you safe.

Your horse experiences both real and perceived fears, and they both feel the same to the horse. In our modern world most fears our horses will face will thankfully be perceived fears. Have you experienced helping your horse overcome his perceived fear? Would you know how to best help him? The best way to help a frightened horse is to firstly to retreat from the fear inducing situation. The retreat enables you to ground your horse's energy and helps you to keep the horse's energy low. Then use the method of approach and retreat, slowly encourage the horse to face his fears by using graded exposure and never push beyond the boundaries the horse feels comfortable with. Crossing this line your horse can cope with can result in your horse losing his mind and becoming very dangerous to handle. This will also damage the trust that you have with your horse. By taking your time and using lots of patience and consistency you will discover your horse can overcome his fears and trust your judgement. It is all about gaining trust and your horse feeling safe. Many natural horsemanship practitioners base their work on this principal. Just two examples are the work of Franklin Levinson, his methods are based on training through trust and Pat Parelli has also done extensive work in this area. A great starting point for you to learn how to overcome your fears is to help a horse overcome his by using a natural horsemanship graded exposure technique with approach and retreat over a period of days. By seeing how you can help your horse are you starting to see how you could start to overcome your fears?

### **Do You Feel the Fear? And Should You do it Anyway?**

Do you or your horse feel fear? We have looked at the two types of fear real and perceived and the fact they both feel the same emotionally and physically. Have you ever sat down and identified your fears? Thought about when they started? What caused / triggered these fears? Are they real fears or perceived fears?





## Real Fears

You can identify real fears by the fact they are about safety issues or lack of skill or knowledge that put you at risk of harm. You have the right to be afraid when you are not safe. Here are some examples of situations that are not safe: A horse that is in a blind panic bolt. A horse that is not in control E.G: bucking, rearing, etc. A horse that is over excited, tense, spooky, and not able to listen. You are told to do something you don't feel ready to do. You lack skills and knowledge to deal with a particular situation. You feel out of your depth. A previous bad experience has scared you so you keep thinking about that bad experience and find it difficult to focus on the task in hand. You or your horse is pushed over the limit you can handle.

## Perceived Fears

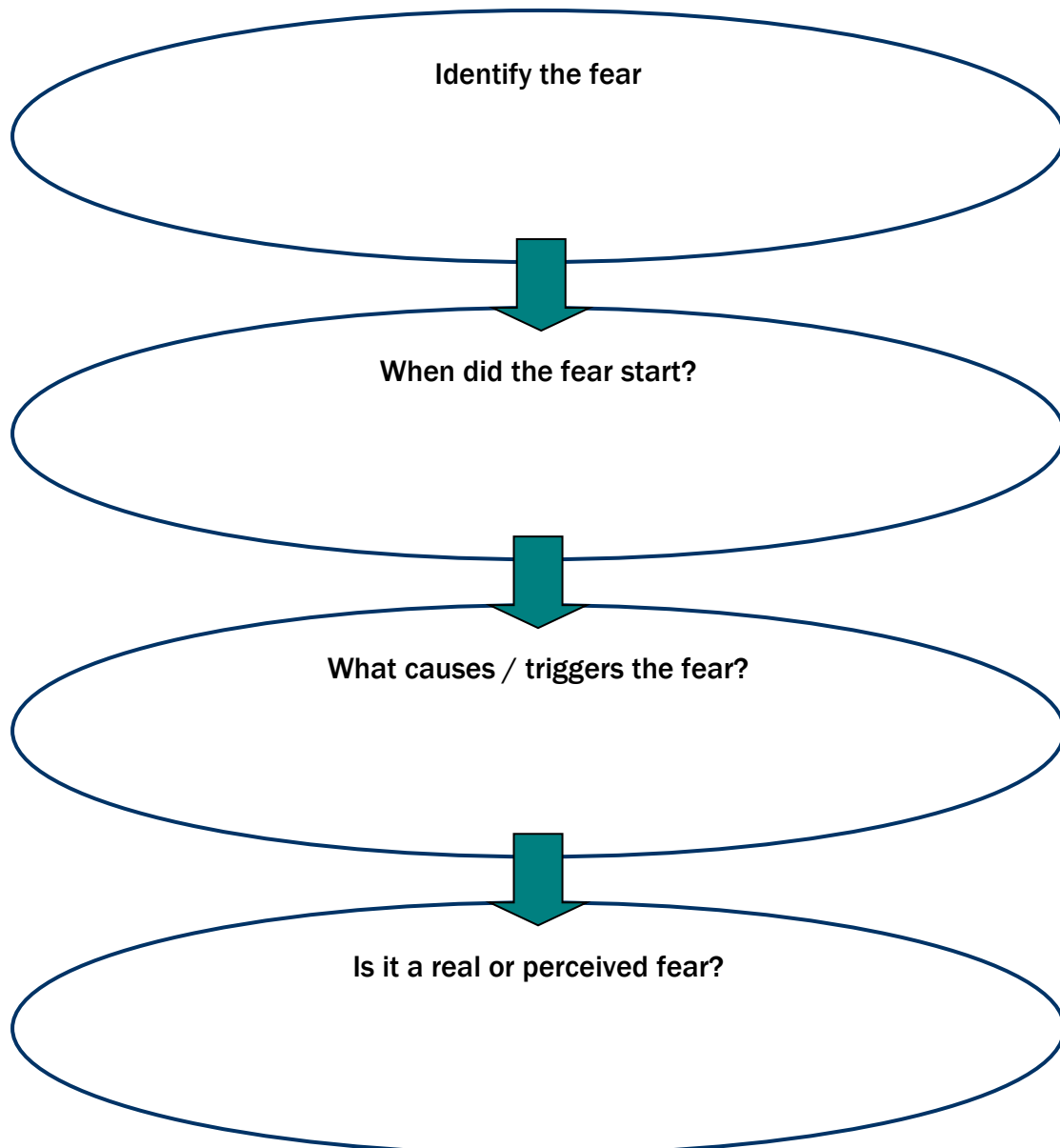
Imagined fears feel as intense as real fears. They are imagined fears, your mind focuses on what might go wrong, or images of other people's bad experiences play in your mind, or stories of other people's misfortunes play on your mind. Sometimes it has its foundation in lack of knowledge and understanding of horses. Many owners find it difficult to understand why their horse behaves as he does and it scares them.

## A Few Tips for Coping with Fear

- Stop telling yourself you are wrong to feel fear
- Remind yourself fear is there to protect you from harm
- Don't be pushed by **anyone** to face your fear
- Only you can decide what is safe for you
- Remind yourself that your safety is your responsibility
- Only work on your fears when you and your horse feel ready
- Work at your pace, don't let others push you no matter what
- Identify the fear
- Pinpoint when did the fear start
- Identify what causes / triggers the fear. Sometimes this has nothing to do with horse riding / handling it can be outside influences e.g. health.
- Learn to identify if it is a real fear or perceived fear
- Plan how you will work on the fear
- Remember the approach and retreat graded exposure technique
- If you can't find the answer, try asking a different question
- Do the same you will get the same
- You may need to try a different approach
- Be prepared to take your time, it takes as long as it takes
- Be prepared to put in the time for consistent practice
- Be realistic about your skills and willing to learn
- Be patient with yourself and your horse
- Don't give yourself a hard time
- Get professional support and use an agreed structured plan
- **It is ok and normal to feel fear**

Before we look at if you should do it anyway and how. The exercise below will help you to answer some fundamental questions about your fear. These will help you to identify what is the best way forward for you. Use the exercise below as many times as you like, keep it simple and pick one fear at a time to look at. Select one fear for you or your horse and jot down your thoughts in the boxes provided. The aim is to help you start to unravel your thinking around fear.

### Exercise – Do you Feel Fear?



By using the exercise above you will have had chance to think in more detail about your fear(s) in a way that is not feeding them, but from a more objective view point. This helps you to better understand them. Ask yourself before this have you ever examined your fear like this before? Or thought that the fear is there for a reason? There is a way forward from fear but without the detailed picture it would be very difficult to plan for success.

## Should You Do it Anyway?

Now you have a better insight into your fears you are better placed to work with a professional to help work through the fear. The instructor should assess both you and your horse and support you with applying a safe and considered graded exposure approach and retreat technique you feel safe applying. You shouldn't face your fear without the skills, knowledge, experience required to deal with the situation. Remind yourself fear is there to protect you from harm. Only you can decide what is safe for you. Your safety is your responsibility. Don't be pushed by anyone to face your fear. You don't have to face your fear and do it anyway.

### Here is an example of a graded exposure approach and retreat technique

**Identify the fear** - Scared of on getting on and riding your horse

**When did the fear start?** – September

**What causes / triggers the fear?** – It was triggered by an outside influence.

Health problem of stress, depression and anxiety related to work pressures.

**Is it a real or perceived fear?** – It is a perceived fear. Thinking rationally it is clear it is safe to ride your own horse. As a in a ten year partnership they have done lots together.

By understanding the fear better you can start to see how to plan to take steps that feel right for an individual. Be prepared to take time and adjust each step as you go along. It is ok to feel fear real or perceived. Here is an example of how you could plan using a graded exposure approach and retreat technique to overcome the above fear.

- 1) **Retreat** - Put on hold riding. **Approach** - Enjoy doing groundwork games. By taking the pressure off you can concentrate on improving your health. When less stressed, depressed and anxious you will be ready to start with dealing with the fear of riding.
- 2) Now you feel healthier you are ready to start with dealing with your perceived fear of riding. **Approach** - You have done lots of groundwork, so you are very happy and confident handling your horse, tacking up etc. **Approach** - Now you feel ready to give riding a go.
- 3) **Retreat** - For your first go at getting on a horse you decide to use a very safe, steady and quiet horse. Not your own horse as he can become excitable. **Approach** - So you go to a local riding school and work with an instructor who understands what you aim to achieve.
- 4) **Approach** – After several sessions (as many as you need taken at the pace you need) with your reliable steady quiet riding school horse you are on able to walk, trot and canter. You now feel ready to give it a go to get on your own horse.
- 5) **Retreat** - Take the pressure off yourself to achieve what you did with your steady riding school horse. **Approach** – After playing groundwork games with your horse you mount up and ride around in walk for a short while and then get off.
- 6) **Approach** – After several sessions of working at your own pace gradually building up what you do with your horse. You are riding again!

Later in this book we will provide you with more information on developing an action plan and there is a template for you to use.

## Warning Signals

Well before we lose our confidence there are often warning signals along the way that flag up that things are not as they should be. The trick is to tune in and listen to these warning signals and not to dismiss them. By learning to read these early warning signs we can take early intervention steps. These warning signals are within us and our horses and they are often subtle. So here are just a few examples to kick start your thinking about what warning signals you are being given by yourself and your horse.

- You can't put your finger on it but something just doesn't feel right.
- Questioning or doubting your ability.
- Performance is lower.
- Physically you and or your horse could feel out of sorts, tense, tired, minor ailments surface, etc.
- Mentally you and or your horse suffer from mood swings, irritability, lack motivation etc.
- Behaviour can change including avoiding things or dreading doing things.
- Your thinking about situations becomes slightly distorted.

Get to know what is normal for both you and your horse, and note any changes. These can be early warning signals that if you learn to listen and take action you can save yourself and your horse the task of solving more complex and difficult challenges further down the road. Tune in to your intuition it is your moral, ethical compass and learning to listen to it helps you to stay safe. If something doesn't feel right the chances are it isn't right.

## The 4 Simple Stages of Problem Solving with an Example

**Stage 1. What is the problem?** You need to move away from generalisations to specific and clearly defined problems that you want to solve. Prioritise as you can only tackle one problem at a time.

**Example** My horse doesn't like leaving his field, he gets scared.

**Stage 2. Identify the possible options open to you.** At this stage don't worry if they are realistic or not, as at this stage everything goes. Be creative and imaginative. Ask friends, family and your instructor to add their ideas to your list of options.

**Example**

- a) Leave him in the field
- b) Work on building trust
- c) Help him feel safe leaving the field

**Stage 3 Decide which options on your list are realistic and unrealistic and why.**

**Example**

- a) Leave him in the field – Realistic it costs nothing. It is ok for the short term but not a great long term option as I want to do more.
- b) Work on building trust – Realistic - This will take time and will need to try a range of approaches. I will need help from an instructor.
- c) Help him feel safe leaving the field – Realistic - graded exposure approach, will need to make the area safe before I can start this.

#### **Stage 4 Select the option(s) that you feel best suits you and your horse**

**Example** - We have selected 3 options that may help with the aim to mix and match the 3 in a plan.

- a) Leave him in the field – I will do this for now and do all the exercises and training with my horse in the field.
- b) Work on building trust – In the field. Play horsemanship games to help build trust.
- c) Help him feel safe leaving the field – Talk to other people at the yard so they know why I am moving hazards and working on gradually working my horse with graded exposure advance and retreat methods between the field and the yard. I need to select times of the day that are best to do this so as not to cause problems for other people.

Use the four simple steps to problem solving to inform your plan of action.



#### **Develop an Action Plan**

Take time to build your personal confidence plan. Success is the result of our planned achievements. Now is the time to start to working with a plan to build your or your horse's confidence. It gives you a direction and focus. Using all the information you have learnt in this resource you can now put down a simple plan to use with professional support.

Remind yourself of the sections in this book they all feed into your confidence plan. Your simple plan will be far more effective and successful if you do. Are you using your comfort zone lists to build a strong foundation for success? Have you practiced compassion and empathy and developing your equine compassion? Seeing the world from another's perspective is essential in

confidence building. You will need bags of patience along your journey in gaining confidence. Plus learn and practice using and reading your and your horse's energy. There is also the effect of your emotions can play in the relationship with your horse. Becoming more confident requires practice, practice, practice and that needs to be simple and consistent. There will be times in your progress that you feel frustrated, at these times are you chasing moonbeams or are you experiencing a spiky profile? Yours and your horse's health have a part to play too, how confident are you that you and your horse are as fit and healthy as you both can be? Are you more aware of how the physical and emotional environment can impact on your confidence? And do you need to change these?

Challenge your negative inner dialogue and the labels we attach to ourselves and our horses. Also by having an understanding of what is confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, panic and fear you should be able to recognise which are impacting on your or your horse's confidence and how best to move forward. Tune with yourself and your horse and spot subtle changes that give you the chance to work on things before they become bigger problems. This resource strongly urges you to invest into the equine and human relationship. Also most importantly highlighted is the skill of being open minded and the barriers that often prevent this.

## Always tackle one problem at a time.

- Break your target / goal down into small achievable steps
- Start with the easiest step and practice it. This practice should be regular, frequent, consistent and prolonged. You / your horse must go on practicing until the anxiety has died down and you / your horse feel more confident before moving onto the next step.
- If something is too hard, look at breaking that step down into intermediate stages. And / or go back a step for a short while.
- Be prepared to try different approaches and to change your plan if you need to. Your plan is not set in stone.
- Reward successes however small.
- Keep a record of your progress.

<b>Your / Your Horse's Target:</b>	
Step 1	Easiest step
Step 2	
Step 3	
Step 4	
Step 5	
Step 6	
Step 7	
Step 8	
Step 9	
Step 10	

You can download for FREE the resource – Set Yourself Up For Success by using this link [https://sites.create-cdn.net/sitefiles/58/9/3/589338/set\\_Your\\_self\\_up\\_for\\_success\\_article.pdf](https://sites.create-cdn.net/sitefiles/58/9/3/589338/set_Your_self_up_for_success_article.pdf)

## Maintaining Progress

### Points to bear in mind to help you / your horse maintain progress is:

- 1) You and your horse need to progress at the pace that feels right for you both. This is different for each person & horse. Never work at a level that pushes you or your horse's anxiety levels beyond comfortable limits. A horse that is very anxious / fearful can be very dangerous. Building confidence takes time.
- 2) Learn and understand horse language, behaviour and personality.
- 3) In each session work on one goal at a time.
- 4) Always use techniques learnt in the previous steps and build on these. Focus on the least anxiety giving step until you / your horse feel comfortable and confident. Then move onto the next step as appropriate.
- 5) Be open minded aim to learn a range equestrian tactics / skills. It is similar to building a tool box of skills. Having a range of skills / tactics / techniques helps you to be better placed to deal with situations.
- 6) Develop a support network. Keep regular contact with your instructor. Your family and friends can be a very valuable in offering encouragement and support. On-line forums....etc. However remember you and your horse are working toward being independent.
- 7) There will be bad days and setbacks. Maintaining progress means being committed and giving your programme high priority. On bad days it is important to look at the total distance travelled; it is therefore a good idea to keep notes to reflect back on. Setbacks can be viewed as positives as they provide learning opportunities to ask why. Work out what if anything went wrong. There may be another solution that will work better for you / your horse. You may have misjudged slightly and set yourself or your horse a too difficult step. And remember everyone has bad days on which they perform badly.
- 8) Practice regularly. Repeat exercises as many times as required. This helps build confidence.
- 9) Put the relationship with your horse first.
- 10) Focus on your achievements and congratulate yourself.
- 11) Identify your / your horse's weaknesses / areas you are struggling with. Share this information with your instructor so you can formulate a plan to overcome them.
- 12) Accept compliments and recognise what you / your horse are good at.
- 13) Give praise to your horse when deserved. Look for him / her trying to do the right thing. This is essential in building and developing a positive relationship.
- 14) Believe in yourself.
- 15) Pinpoint your worrying thoughts. Write them down, by bringing them out into the open relieves the pressure. You can then look at the evidence and what is the probability that your thought is correct. Ask yourself is there anything I can do about this? Is there anything I can do to change the situation? Bring your worries to the attention of your instructor.
- 16) Never be afraid to ask questions or ask for help.

## **Celebrate and Congratulate**

Do you ever praise yourself for a job well done? Or congratulate yourself for that step taken on the journey of learning? Or celebrate your achievements? If you do then congratulations, well done! Many people find it very hard to celebrate and congratulate them-selves especially when they lack confidence. They often do the very opposite and focus on the things that haven't gone well, the negative aspects, and then give them-selves a hard time. This feeds the cycle of losing confidence therefore to build and maintain confidence it is essential that you become aware if you are prone to doing this. Or all the hard work you are putting into your confidence building will be undermined.

So next time you feel you have achieved even the smallest step in your journey in building confidence think about how you can celebrate and congratulate yourself. By doing this you can see how these achievements help build confidence. You could keep a journal, simply jot down what you achieved and how you felt in a diary entry. It is a good resource to reflect back upon, as it can show you on the days you struggle the total distance you have travelled and what you have overall achieved. Get creative and think about how you can start to change your thinking and how you can mark your achievements / milestones.

Building confidence will take as long as it needs to take for you and your horse, there is no quick fix, no magical pill or supplement and no fix it all training gadget. I hope you use the introduction to building confidence and keep dipping into it from time to time. Use it as a spring board to further learning. This resource was never produced to provide you with the answers as each of us are looking for our own individual answers. It provides you with insights that guide you towards finding the questions you need to ask to find your answers.

## **Some final thoughts to ponder**

- If you want your dreams to come true, be prepared to put in time and effort.
- The level of confidence you feel and the happiness of your life is reliant on the quality of your thoughts.
- Nothing ventured nothing is gained, find the courage to take the first step if not you have already finished.
- Start confidence building today as procrastination is wasted time and you can't recycle wasted time.
- Ideas can't work unless 'you' do.
- Your confidence needs your mind to act like a parachute. A parachute functions only when open.
- It is never too late to build confidence.
- Life is too short to be limited by lack of confidence.
- Learning to build confidence can change your life, let it.
- Nobody said building confidence is quick or easy however it is worth it.
- The time and effort of building confidence is better than a life of regret.
- The fact you have got to the end of this book is the first step towards you building and gaining confidence. This is your first step on your journey carry on taking small steps.

Good luck with your journey of building confidence. Take it one step at a time.